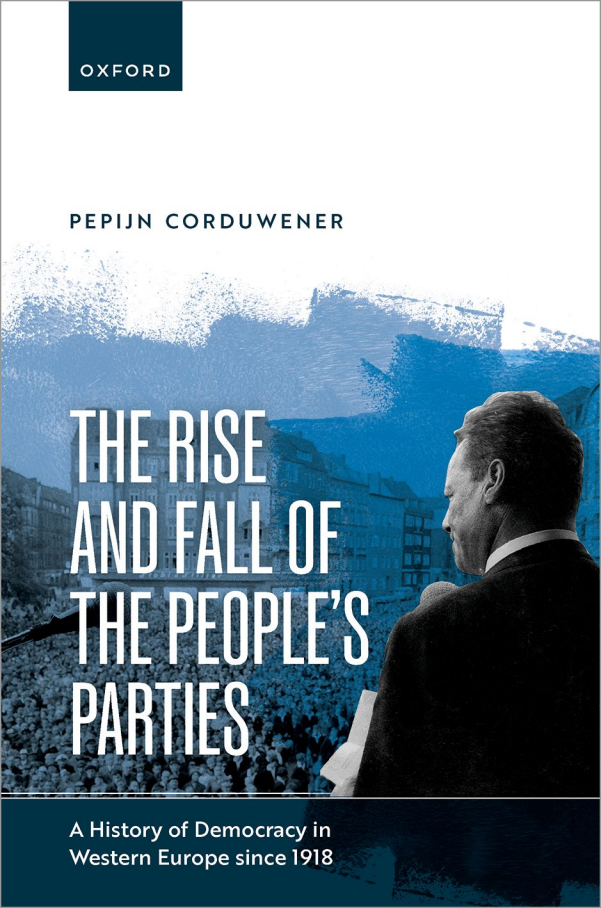


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PEPIJN CORDUWENER



THE RISE
AND FALL OF
THE PEOPLE'S
PARTIES

A History of Democracy in
Western Europe since 1918

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To Giovanna

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Introduction

The People's Parties and Democracy in Past and Present

This is a book about the history of democracy. But it is also written at a particular moment in the history of democracy, one that is widely perceived as a period of deep crisis or even democratic decline. At the end of the Cold War many people displayed great optimism about the prospects of democracy, as they claimed it would spread from the shores of the Atlantic ever further south and east. But thirty years on, self-assurance has made place for caution and concern. Around the globe, much of the democratic progress of the 1990s has evaporated. Even along the shores of the Atlantic, many observers now fear that the future of democracy looks dim, and that 'shock elections' which bring populists to (the verge of) government power make a democratic revival increasingly unlikely. Europe seems on the 'road to unfreedom', to be falling for the 'allures of authoritarianism', and to be sending 'warnings' from the old world to the new (where the prospects of democracy hardly seem any better).¹

Our preoccupation with the current state of democracy is understandable. But the assumption that democracy is in jeopardy because it is being suddenly challenged by forces from the outside, mostly in populist guise, tends to obscure an understanding of deeper-lying trends that have slowly changed it from within. It tends to mistake the effect of what is so widely perceived as an existential crisis of democracy for its cause. Rather than the populist waves that catch the eye of political observers, the shifting currents below the surface merit our attention. Populism appears in a void that has appeared at the heart of European democracies, in a vacuum in which not so long ago the people's parties of the centre-left and centre-right buttressed the democratic order. These parties shaped the face

¹ The current crisis of democracy is a booming scholarly topic. Some of the more prominent recent studies include S. Levitsky and D. Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2019) and D. Runciman, *How Democracy Ends* (London: Profile Books, 2018); T. Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom. Russia, Europe, America* (London: Tim Duggan Books, 2018); A. Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy. The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism* (New York: Random House, 2020) and Y. Mounk, *The People versus Democracy. Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019). The same counts for populism, which has quickly emerged as a focus area of political scientists on both sides of the Atlantic. See in particular the work of Cas Mudde including C. Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007) and C. Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism in Europe and the Americas. Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For a good conceptual approach to the topic, see J. W. Müller, *What Is Populism* (London: Penguin Press, 2017).

and formed the soul of democratic politics across Europe for decades. The Gaullists and Socialists in France; the Socialists and Christian Democrats in Italy, Austria, Germany, and the Low Countries; the Socialists in Sweden, and the Socialists and Popular Party in Spain: for decades we could not imagine democracy without such parties. Now, as they lose ground at every single election and face a haemorrhage of members, we will have to.

The decline of what this book calls the 'people's parties' means much more than that voters change their preferences at the ballot booth. Democracy built on people's parties is the only kind of stable democracy that Western Europe has known. Before the people's parties emerged, Europe's first experience with mass democracy finished badly in many countries in the 1920s and 1930s, fatally weakened by polarization and governmental instability. And now that the people's parties are in steep decline, democracy moves into uncharted territory, leaving many people concerned about its destination—and, indeed, destiny. Our inability to imagine what for a long time seemed a contradiction in terms, to think of democracy beyond the people's parties, lies at the heart of the democratic crisis of today.

We can only answer the question as to why the decline of the people's parties throws into question the future of democracy if we first answer another question: why were the people's parties so crucial for the stabilization of democracy in the first place? This book explores the striking parallels between the life of the people's parties and that of democracy over the course of the past century. In doing so, it offers a new perspective on the history of democracy in Western Europe by narrating that history not through the clash of ideologies, geopolitical standoff between superpowers, or the reform of formal democratic institutions like constitutions and courts. Instead, it studies it through the prism of the rise and fall of the people's party; a party model that despite different national traditions and trajectories came to display a striking uniformity across borders and political families. As such, it ties together three epochs which are often studied in disjunction: the two troubled decades following the introduction of mass democracy in the wake of the First World War; the *trente glorieuses* following the Second World War when democracy experienced an unparalleled period of stability and legitimacy; and the period since the 1970s, when democratic institutions have remained largely stable, but trust in them among citizens has radically declined—a period that still looms over the horizon of most historical work, but stands at the centre of political-science debates nowadays.²

² A transnational emphatically historical study on democracy in the Interwar era probably remains to be written, but a good start is C. Millington and K. Passmore, eds, *Political Violence and Democracy in Interwar Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). The interest for the post-1945 era is growing, symbolized by the excellent M. Conway, *Western Europe's Democratic Age, 1945–1968* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020). A first attempt to confront the position and legacy of

This book argues that adopting the perspective of the 'people's parties' can help to explain the twisted turns of democracy that marked the twentieth century. In particular, it demonstrates how the transformation of the Socialist and confessional mass parties as they had emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which were concerned most of all with the expression of the interests and identities of a fixed group of supporters from below,³ into broad-based people's parties contributed to the stability and legitimacy of democracy after 1945. Parties as disparate as French Gaullists, Italian Christian Democrats, and German Social Democrats came to share three characteristics which made them, regardless of national or ideological differences, part of the people's party family. The balance between these characteristics allowed for their contribution to democratic stability and legitimacy, while the absence of this balance was a major cause of the challenges posed to democracy in the Interwar era. However, the loss of this balance was also a cause of democracy's growing problems since the 1970s. While the Interwar mass parties were concerned mostly with representing and rallying their constituents, the people's parties have in the past few decades become increasingly focused on government—a trend indeed noticed by today's party scholars, most notably Peter Mair, and held responsible for growing democratic fatigue.⁴

So what were the three characteristics of the people's parties in postwar Europe? First, people's parties did not claim to represent solely specific social or religious groups, thus sharpening societal divisions and replicating these on a political level. Instead, they integrated a broad section of the electorate in their parties, thus fostering social peace and combatting political polarization. They were not exclusive in nature but stood in principle open to anyone and therefore claimed to represent the general interest rather than the strictly partisan one. Second, precisely because people's parties stood open to anyone and claimed to go beyond particular interests, they were willing to compromise and collaborate. They were no mere parties of 'propaganda' that expressed (and fuelled) the opinions and interests of their supporters on the street, confining their role to the representation

the 1970s and 1980s in European history was taken by the special issue Andreas Wirsching, ed., 'The 1970s and 1980s as Turning Point in European History', *Journal of Modern European History*, 9, 1 (2011).

³ See for a conceptualization of the mass party the classic M. Duverger, *Les partis politiques* (Paris: Librairie Armand Collin, 1951).

⁴ R. S. Katz and P. Mair, 'Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party', *Party Politics* 1.5 (1995), 5–28. See also P. Mair, *Ruling the Void. The Hollowing of Western Democracy* (London: Verso, 2013). The theme has resonated widely among party scholars, see also the special issue dedicated to the work of Peter Mair after he passed away: L. Bardi, S. Bartolini, and A. Trechsel, eds, 'Themed Issue: Party Adaptation and Change and the Crisis of Democracy. Essays in Honour of Peter Mair', *Party Politics* 20.2 (2014). See for a more critical evaluation: Y. Aucante and A. Dézé, *Les systèmes de partis dans les démocraties occidentales. Le modèle du parti-cartel en question* (Paris: Sciences-Po Presses, 2008); R. Koole, 'Cadre, Catch-All or Cartel: A Comment on the Notion of the Cartel Party', *Party Politics* 2.4 (1996), 507–23.

of the groups that supported them. Rather, they were parties that were willing to take on the burden of governmental responsibility. This also implied a willingness to share power and compromise with competitors and to see these as democratic equals, not as arch enemies. Along with these two characteristics came a third. The people's parties were deeply rooted in society thanks to the work of tireless officials, the distribution of their own newspapers, alliances with cultural and sports organizations and offices in the most remote countryside villages of the country. This legitimized democracy from below as it enabled citizens to participate in the politics of their cities and countries.

With the choice to call parties which united these three characteristics 'people's parties', this book uses a concept closely tied to different national traditions.⁵ Over the course of the past century a wide range of parties have called themselves this way. In France, Spain, and particularly in Italy, the term 'people's party' was closely tied to the *popolarismo* of the political Catholic movement. It emphasized autonomy of politics from the Church, a dedication to social justice and respect for the constitution and political pluralism, and still refers to Christian Democrat parties.⁶ In German-speaking Europe, the term had at times a more explicit nationalist or ethnic connotation, for instance with the German National People's Party of the Weimar Republic. But after 1945, the term 'people's party' here has referred to the Christian Democrat and Social Democrat parties. Although coming from different directions, they were jointly motivated to overcome the weaknesses of Interwar democracy such as polarization, governmental instability, and the political reproduction of deep social cleavages. The transformation of Catholic and Socialist mass parties into people's parties was therefore a response to the 'Weimar trauma'.⁷ But this trauma was no Germany particularity: Western Europe as a whole had experienced an existential crisis of democracy in the 1920s and 1930s. Consequently, the postwar 'people's party' was no example of German exceptionalism.⁸ Instead, as this book demonstrates, across Western

⁵ There is little on the conceptual history of the term 'people's party', especially outside Germany. See for instance D. Buchhaas, *Die Volkspartei. Programmatische Entwicklung der CDU 1950–1973* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1981), 30–1, who emphasized the tendency of people's parties to go beyond representation of single groups and situated them as heirs of the 'integration parties' of the Interwar era.

⁶ C. Invernizzi Accetti, *What Is Christian Democracy? Politics, Religion, Ideology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), ch. 3.

⁷ S. Ullrich, *Der Weimar-Komplex. Das Scheitern der ersten deutschen Demokratie und die politische Kultur der frühen Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2009).

⁸ Which made the people's party different from the catch-all party as envisioned by Kirchheimer: O. Kirchheimer, 'The Transformation of the Western European Party System', in O. Kirchheimer, *Politics, Law, and Social Change. Selected Essays of Otto Kirchheimer* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 346–71; Gordon Smith held that 'people's party' was a much more useful concept for analysing both German and European postwar politics. In particular, he stated that 'in combination of the old and new, the *Volkspartei* is the dominant West European form, not a German deviation': G. Smith, 'The German *Volkspartei* and the Career of the Catch-All Concept', in H. Döring and G. Smith, eds, *Party Government and Political Culture in Western Germany* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 59–76: 73.

Europe mass parties transformed into people's parties by uniting these three characteristics.

The perspective of the people's party allows us to see that democracy was stabilized after 1945 because of the dominance of parties that focused neither solely on representation from below nor which dedicated themselves primarily to governing from above. Indeed, as noted by Peter Mair, it is the balance between what he called 'representative' and 'responsible' government which is vital for the legitimation of democracy.⁹ Democracy inevitably faces tensions between the need to represent from below and to govern from above, and these need to be somehow overcome. Mair already noted that parties made a 'unique contribution . . . to the development of democracy [because] they combined these two crucial roles into one. . . . The same organization that governed the citizenry also gave that citizenry voice.'¹⁰ Another foremost democracy scholar, Larry Diamond, likewise saw the paradox between what he called 'representativeness' and 'governability' as one of the essential challenges of democracy—and he also noted the importance of strong and moderate parties for democratic stability.¹¹ However this tension is phrased, this book investigates how a particular type of parties, the people's parties, came to express and balance these unique qualities to solve democracy's fundamental tensions in the twentieth century. Precisely by virtue of their combining and uniting these three characteristics, the people's parties were able to provide stable government, ease social tensions, and generate support on the level of society, bridging these two worlds of government and society that at various moments in the past century grew dangerously far apart, at times even jeopardizing democracy as a result.

This book therefore traces the arch of democracy that spanned the twentieth century as parties sought after, established, and lost a balance between these three traits of the people's party of forging broadly based social coalitions, practising the politics of compromise, and fostering democracy on the ground by an intricate network of social organizations. The notion that, unlike those of the nineteenth century, the politics of the twentieth century required such a type of party travelled a long way before becoming mainstream. Already at the dawn of the twentieth century some politicians advocated for the virtues of the people's party model.

One of these pioneers was a Socialist, previously exiled because of his political activism, writing in Berlin, the bustling capital of the powerful and quickly industrializing German empire. Eduard Bernstein was a prominent member of

⁹ P. Mair, *Representative versus Responsible Government*, MPiFG Working Paper 9/8 (2009). Found on <https://www.mpifg.de/pu/workpap/wp09-8.pdf>

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹ L. J. Diamond, 'Three Paradoxes of Democracy', *Journal of Democracy* 1.3 (1990) 48–60: 53–6.

the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), which was at least nominally committed to revolution. But he was ever less certain as to whether the party's anti-system stance and exclusive identification with the working class were compatible with the party's other objective, namely, to foster democracy in the authoritarian German empire. In 1905, Bernstein wrote an article in the magazine of the SPD in which he wondered whether the SPD was turning into a what he called a 'people's party'. The SPD, he concluded, could not possibly be genuinely democratic and at the same time exploit elections just to wage propaganda and contest the regime. Nor could it limit itself to representing the working class alone, confirmed for him by the fact that the SPD collected half a million 'bourgeois' votes at the previous parliamentary election. The SPD, he argued therefore, faced a fundamental dilemma over whether it should be a 'proletarian-revolutionary class party or social democratic people's party'. And the answer for him was clear: 'without ceasing to be in the first place the party of the working class, the social democrats are ever more a people's party. The party is ever more a coalition of democratic segments of the people...and it is obvious that such a political mixture of classes will inevitably affect the nature of the party.'¹²

Bernstein realized something essential about the new kind of politics which was emerging in Europe, and his analysis proved to be far-sighted: if democracy was to become both a legitimate and stable form of government (and, obviously, the two requirements were related), *and* if democracy was, in a time when people organized politically in parties, necessarily party democracy, a particular type of party was needed to meet the challenge of stabilizing and legitimizing mass democracy: a 'people's party'. It was obvious that democracy could not be built on the representation of a single class or group alone, as the mass parties did, but only on what Bernstein called a 'coalition of democratic segments of the people'. Moreover, if parties really wanted to foster democracy, they could not do so solely by protesting and waging propaganda, but they should take elections and parliament seriously. In other words, parties should behave responsibly, and politicians should see parties as more than instruments of working-class or Catholic mobilization and be ready to practise the politics of compromise.

Bernstein painted this perspective on the people's party right at the beginning of the century. He was soon followed by others, such as the Swedish Socialist leader Hjalmar Branting, the Belgian Socialist Hendrik de Man, the Italian priest and politician Luigi Sturzo, and the German Catholic politician and trade union leader Adam Stegerwald. But while their ideas on the people's party were highly original, they often encountered strong resistance. It took decades before most Socialist and Catholic parties really became people's parties. This was an arduous process in which the advocates of the 'proletarian-revolutionary class party', as

¹² E. Bernstein, 'Wird die Sozialdemokratie Volkspartei?', *Sozialistische Monatshefte* 9 (1905), 661-5.

Bernstein called them, and more conservative confessionals, regularly held sway. For the SPD, Bernstein's own party and often regarded a model for others, it took until the party conference at Bad Godesberg in 1959, with the mayor of West Berlin Willy Brandt as embodiment of its transformation. The same counted for most Catholic parties, which only after the Second World War opened to non-believers and people of different faith and became fully comfortable with governing in a liberal setting. And it was only when the Socialist and Catholic parties found a balance between the three ingredients of the people's party, that democracy indeed became stabilized and legitimized after decades of upheaval, while precisely the loss of that balance lies at the root of the challenges democracy is facing today.

To understand how the emergence and decline of the people's party influenced the life of democracy in the past century, this book draws on historical experiences and ideas from Sweden to Spain, and places in between. But it gives particular weight to four countries where the parallels between people's party and democracy can best be observed—Austria, France, Germany, and Italy. This choice for an emphatically Western European perspective might need justification in a time of global histories of democracy.¹³ The people's party was, however, a distinctly continental Western European invention, even if in the Eastern half of the continent such parties could not freely emerge after they fell under the Soviet sphere of influence after 1945 (nor did they, however, after the Berlin Wall came down). Likewise, the people's party also set Western European experiences apart from the British and American parties, which traditionally were much more electoral machines rather than real mass parties, while both countries lacked the socialist and Christian democrat traditions that were prevalent in continental Europe (they had 'leftist' and 'Labour' parties but no Socialist ones, and 'conservative' but no confessional ones), and did not experience democratic crisis and collapse in the 1920s and 1930s (which does not mean that British or American influences did not reach the continental European politics and that influence of course gets a place in this book).

As such, the geographical focus of this book serves to highlight something distinct about Western European politics. In the first three to four decades, there was a broad diversity in political regimes across the continent. Any observer in, say, 1936 would quickly notice that liberal democracy as it was practised in Belgium and the Netherlands was but one option among many (and, at the time, certainly not one with the brightest prospects). There were the Nazi and Fascist regimes in Germany and Italy, distinct from one another, but there were

¹³ D. Stasavage, *The Decline and Rise of Democracy. A Global History from Antiquity to Today* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2020); T. Kaplan, *Democracy: A World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

also varieties on Catholic corporatist regimes in Portugal and Austria, and the year saw the emergence, by war, of a conservative-Catholic dictatorship in Spain, while a Popular Front supported by Communists ruled in France. What struck any observer in, say, 1980, would have been the striking similarity of regimes across Western Europe, which by now had not only converged on a form of liberal parliamentary democracy but on a form of democracy which was built on the hegemony of the centre-left and centre-right people's parties. It seemed only natural that Spain and Portugal, which had just emerged from their decades-long dictatorships then, also adopted this same people's party model.

While the perspective of the people's party therefore also helps to explain the growing homogeneity of Western European politics over the course of the century, it has limits. By looking at the people's parties from the inside, this book inevitably adopts their, at times jaundiced, views on the world. Despite their claims, they were often not representative for society as a whole and far from diverse. Most notably, this counts for the fact that for much of the twentieth century (and, one might add, even today) the affairs of these parties were dominated by middle-aged men. For a long time, and certainly to a large extent also today, the people's parties were a form of male politics, in their membership base, their political culture, their leadership, and the policies they proposed. Only slowly, in the final decades of the twentieth century, did this start to change. But the history of democracy is obviously not the history of middle-aged men, but certainly also the contestation of the power and privileges of middle-aged men. Obviously, this contestation also gets a place in this book: the fact that these parties were no longer representative of societies that were ever more diverse and unable to address this structurally is indeed an important explanation for their growing problems. It is therefore important to note that writing a history of democracy through the perspective of the people's party does not suggest that people's party democracy is the only form, let alone only desirable form, of democracy possible. It was a form of democracy with many shortcomings. There are numerous forms of democracy before and outside it and even against it (a topic that probably deserves a book of its own), just as there will be other forms of democracy after it—as we are trying to explore today.

Moreover, the perspective of the people's party is certainly not the only possible perspective on the history of democracy. Rather, this book adds to a still quickly expanding body of scholarship on the theme. Indeed, partly in response to the situation in which democracy finds itself today, the history of democracy is a booming topic for scholars in both the political and historical sciences.¹⁴ And for

¹⁴ J. W. Müller, *Contesting Democracy. Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); J. Kurunmäki, J. Nevers, and H. te Velde, eds, *Democracy in Modern Europe. A Conceptual History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); S. Berman, *Democracy and*

many, the question why democracy acquired such a remarkable degree of stability in the second half of the century after the upheavals of the first (and, implicitly, why this stability has waned more recently) stands at the centre of their research. Parties obviously already play a role in existing narratives of this arc of democracy that spans the twentieth century.¹⁵ Many studies are still implicitly based on the classic statements of the American scholar Eric Schattschneider that 'political parties created democracy and that modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties'.¹⁶ But they often do in a particular way, namely often as by-products of other, seemingly more important explanations for the twisted history of democracy.

One major perspective on the contemporary history of democracy claims that the century can best be understood by seeing it through the lens of the clash of ideologies that marked it. If the twentieth century was an 'age of extremes', it was so in large part because it brought forward such radical ideologies as fascism and communism.¹⁷ And if, ultimately, democracy seemed to have 'won' this struggle of ideas, it was so because it offered a sense of security and moderation that other ideologies were unable to offer—security that was welcomed especially after the political violence of the period between 1914 and the 1940s.¹⁸ But, because all ideologies played on the lexicon of democracy in the age of mass politics, democracy itself underwent major changes in the process, becoming much more concerned with restraining the will of the people rather than expressing it.¹⁹

This focus on the history of ideas has much to offer, even if only because political ideas mattered perhaps more than ever in the twentieth century. But it is always difficult to explain exactly how they influenced political events, as ideas never exist in a vacuum. Parties were obviously producers and carriers of political ideas. Another major perspective on democracy therefore emphasizes not so much ideas, but institutions, as in the formal rules that govern the democratic

Dictatorship in Europe. From the Ancien Régime to the Present (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); D. Stone, *Goodbye to All That? A Story of Europe since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); P. Corduener, *The Problem of Democracy in Postwar Europe. Political Actors and Competing Conceptions of Democracy in France, West Germany, and Italy* (London: Routledge, 2017). For a *longue durée* perspective that testifies to the same growing interest see J. Dunn, *Setting the People Free. The Story of Democracy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018).

¹⁵ Sometimes, there is a tendency to credit one party family for the rise of democracy in Europe, see for instance G. Eley, *Forging Democracy. The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) and D. Ziblatt, *Conservative Parties and the Birth of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), although the historiography on Christian democracy has sometimes been more critical, see most notably T. Buchanan and M. Conway, eds, *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918–1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹⁶ E. E. Schattschneider, *Party Government* (New York: Reinhardt Publishers, 1942), 1.

¹⁷ See especially K. D. Bracher, *The Age of Ideologies. A History of Political Thought in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1985); Müller, *Contesting Democracy*. The term 'age of extremes' comes from E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Vintage, 1994).

¹⁸ A. Bauerkämper, 'The Twisted Road to Democracy as a Quest for Security: Germany in the Twentieth Century', *German History* 32.3 (2014), 431–55.

¹⁹ This was the key argument of: Müller, *Contesting Democracy*.

game and force, or fail to force, the main players to stick to them.²⁰ So, for instance, many point to the electoral system of proportional representation as a major cause of democratic problems in the Interwar era, because this system tends to fragmentize parliament and produce weak governments. This was allegedly particularly proven by the experience of the Weimar Republic, where parliament was deeply divided among more than a dozen groups and splinter parties. The changed rules of the game after 1945 thereby allegedly explain why 'Bonn is not Weimar', as one influential critic noted who compared Germany's first and second experiment with parliamentary democracy.²¹ Such conclusions about Germany are often applied to Europe as a whole, where the electoral changes, the empowerment of (constitutional) courts and all kind of advisory bodies with legal powers 'restrained' but also stabilized democracy after 1945.²² However, also this perspective has also limitations. The 'rules of the game' are certainly important. And because they were extensively rewritten in the aftermath of the First and the Second World War, the attention for them is understandable. But the rules of the game alone do not explain why in some countries democracy managed to weather the storm of the Interwar era with relative ease, whereas others did not, or why similar institutions could produce radically different results: Austria's constitution of 1919 provided the backdrop of two decades of growing polarization, government instability, and, ultimately, civil war. But the same constitution was adopted again in 1945 and Austria was for decades one of the most stable democracies in the world.

A third perspective sees the stabilization of democracy after 1945 not so much as the result of the ideas of its main actors and their ability to translate these into resilient institutions, but as the product of shifting class alliances and greater social equality. Especially the Second World War with its devastating social and economic consequences was therefore something of a great equalizer which greatly diminished not only the economic, but also the political power of elites hostile to democracy.²³ This is an argument which might work well for some countries, for instance with Germany, but much less for others. Most notably, also this perspective seems to have a limited perspective on parties, seeing them mostly as 'frozen' on social and cultural 'cleavages',²⁴ while, in reality, parties also played a role in the

²⁰ This is a prevalent perspective in several political science studies to the period such as D. Berg-Schlosser and J. Mitchell, eds, *Authoritarianism and Democracy in Europe, 1918–1939. Comparative Analyses* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). See also G. Capoccia, *Defending Democracy. Reactions to Extremism in Interwar Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

²¹ F. R. Allemann, *Bonn ist nicht Weimar* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1956).

²² See in particular S. Berman, 'Institutions and the Consolidation of Democracy in Postwar Europe', in O. Fioretos, T. G. Falletti, and A. Sheingate, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Institutionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 403–16.

²³ M. Mazower, *Dark Continent. Europe's Twentieth Century* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), ch. 9.

²⁴ The classic of persistent voter patterns is S. Lipset and S. Rokkan, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (New York: Free Press, 1967). Inglehart published his study of voter change ten years later: R. Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution. Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977).

creation of such cleavages by expressing interests and identities, but also, after 1945, in brokering compromises, materially and culturally, to overcome them. Indeed, it was their ability to unite different groups in their ranks and reaching out to other parties which played such a central role in the stabilization of democracy after 1945—as did their programmes to foster the welfare state and redistributions of land and income.

So if we want to explore the parallels between the people's party and democracy in full, we cannot content ourselves with stories that see parties as by-products of ideas, institutions, or social trends which they had no power to influence. We need to take parties seriously and not see them as 'pinballs pushed around by the forces of external events', as the American sociologist Stephanie Mudge recently put it.²⁵ Neither can we be guided by the implicit nostalgia for the golden age of the party which is prevalent in some party scholarship today.²⁶ The assumption that democracy has been degraded to a kind of 'post-democracy' or 'audience democracy' because political leaders have abandoned the model of the mass party and turned citizens into spectators while they share the spoils of government is widespread.²⁷ But to understand the tribulations of party democracy we should read history not backwards to find leads for today's problems, because the leads we might find might often be coincidental. We should study it forward from the beginning of the century when party democracy was first established.²⁸ We can then trace the quest of Europeans for a model of political organization that provided an answer to one of the most formidable challenges that lay ahead: how can stable democratic government, which secures somehow the general interest, be assured when a form of political organization, the mass party, becomes dominant that does the exact opposite, namely to represent partisan interests and rally their supporters against those of opposing parties?

To write the history of democracy through the people's party perspective, this book starts in the aftermath of the First World War, when universal (male) suffrage and the responsibility of governments before parliament became the norm from Sweden to Sicily. It traces how the people's party emerged slowly out of the traumatic learning experience that marked the deeply troubled first half of the twentieth century, when it often existed more in the heads and hearts of

²⁵ S. Mudge, *Leftism Reinvented. Western Parties from Socialism to Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), xvii.

²⁶ See for the nostalgia for 'Europe's democratic age': Conway, *Europe's Democratic Age*, 297–303.

²⁷ C. Crouch, *Coping with Post-Democracy* (London: Fabian Society, 2002), B. Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For an alternative narrative see P. Rosanvallon, *Counter Democracy. Politics in the Age of Distrust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

²⁸ On the importance of reading history 'forward' see G. Capoccia and D. Ziblatt, 'The Historical Turn in Democratization Studies. A New Research Agenda for Europe and Beyond', *Comparative Political Studies* 43.9 (2010), 931–68.

pioneering politicians who wanted to draw their countries back from the brink of political polarization than in real life. Despite such efforts, it proved impossible to shed the anti-system heritage of nineteenth-century mass parties devoted to representing exclusive social groups, also, or perhaps especially, when democracy became pressured by forces of the radical left and right. This inability to transform mass parties into people's parties harmed their ability to compromise and hurt governmental stability, damaging the legitimacy of democratic institutions, and turning many initial (lukewarm) supporters of the new democratic order into overt critics. The ideas about the people's party consequently lost out in a clash of competing conceptions of party politics against those of the mass party and its authoritarian off-shoots.

Yet if the Interwar era was a traumatic experience, it was also fundamental for forging the people's party as a political model that contributed to the remarkable stabilization of democracy after the Second World War. This is the theme of the second part of the book. The people's parties' crucial contribution lay in the fact that they now struck a careful balance between the three elements of openness to different social interests, governmental responsibility and willingness to compromise, and representation from below. This counted first and foremost for Christian Democrats, but by the end of the 1950s, the drive for renewal also reached the more traditional Socialists of Austria, Italy, France, and Germany. After Charles De Gaulle returned to power in 1958 to establish the French Fifth Republic, also the Gaullist movement slowly started to turn into a people's party which managed to heal some of the deep political divisions that divided French society historically. By the 1960s, the convergence around this model culminated in an unprecedented period of democratic stability and legitimacy. In radical contrast to the Interwar era, the virtues of the people's party—collaboration, consensus, compromise—now became the virtues of democracy as such—and would be exported to Spain and Portugal when they democratized in the following decade. Not without reason political observers of the time noticed, and praised, that the people's parties had made democracy into some kind of 'super-ideology' that swept away the heated ideological strife of the previous decades.²⁹

Paradoxically, however, the key to the successful stabilization of European politics also harboured the seeds of its future decline, which is the topic of the third part of this book. In the 1970s, the people's parties faced two challenges that not only in themselves were difficult to respond to, but that also created tensions inside parties that were difficult to bridge. The first challenge was about finding new ways to connect to a society which was ever more rebellious and ever more individualistic, less confined in the social and cultural subcultures of before. It forced parties to connect to new groups and explore novel forms of participation

²⁹ H. Tingsten, *The Problem of Democracy* (New York: Bedminster Press, 1965), 195.

and representation. Their efforts culminated in the 'open party' that was, ideally, no longer a collective of members but a network of all citizens. But while this was intended to revive parties, the 'open party' actually underlined that parties seemed increasingly superfluous as instruments for political participation. At the same time, the economic downturn after the 1973 Oil Crisis questioned the entire postwar social and economic model. This challenge required parties to display their skills in crisis management and to emphasize their governing qualities in times of hardship. In other words, it pushed them in the exact opposite direction as that of the open party, as they devoted their energy on reforming an allegedly too large, too wasteful, and too inefficient state while they found purpose, in the catchword of the time, in providing 'governability'—a trend noted by contemporary political scientists who saw this orientation of the state as part of the evolution into 'cartel parties'.³⁰

By the 1990s, it had become increasingly evident that the formula of the people's party had run its course. Despite many efforts to reconnect to society, it proved impossible for them to either regain the social support that they used to have nor to build the kind of broad social alliances inside their own ranks. Moreover, their tendency to devote more and more energy to governing further upset the balance between the three elements of the people's party. But, as the epilogue of this book argues, even though the prospects of the people's party are slim today, this does not mean that with the fall of the people's party, democracy itself will also descend into existential crisis. While people's party was the answer to the challenges of the previous century, our own age calls for new answers and its own democratic experiments.

³⁰ Most notably: Mair, *Ruling the Void*; Mair, *Representative versus Responsible Government*.

PART I
THE MAKING AND BREAKING OF
PARTY DEMOCRACY, 1918-45

1

The End of the War

Party Democracy and the Legacies of the Nineteenth Century

The First World War was a watershed in the history of democracy. As soon as it ended, it was immediately evident that the political regimes of before 1914 really belonged to ‘the world of yesterday’.¹ The image of the German emperor anxiously applying for asylum at a non-descript Dutch border train station on a foggy autumn morning evocatively captured the collapse of an entire political order based on royal authority. The Habsburg and Hohenzollern dynasties were stripped of their powers and exiled as the German and Austrian empires disintegrated. Yet also among the liberal elites in countries which won the War, like France and Italy, or that remained neutral, like the Netherlands and Sweden, everyone realized that the postwar world needed a new kind of politics. As one Italian politician told his colleagues in parliament: ‘anyone of us who wants to go up on a balcony to address the masses repeating what we said in 1913 would meet either hilarity or rage. We all feel that everything that used to be the foundation and architecture of our political thought has collapsed.’²

The War was therefore a definitive caesura that delegitimized the conservative-liberal elites who had seemed almost untouchable before—and their way of doing politics. In the aftermath of the War, the responsibility of government before parliament and universal male suffrage became the norm (women remained excluded in many places including Belgium, Spain, France, and Italy). The new Socialist Chancellor of Austria, Karl Renner, captured the euphoria by stating that ‘it is undeniable: today democracy has become the basic law of the entire world’.³ However, while many, with Renner, hoped that democracy could be the foundation of the new postwar political order, many of the democratic regimes that emerged from the war soon ran into problems of toxic polarization and structural governmental instability. Two decades after the signing of the Versailles Peace

¹ S. Zweig, *Die Welt von Gestern. Erinnerungen eines Europäers* (Stockholm: Bermann Fischer Verlag, 1942).

² Empedecole Restivo in *Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei deputati, XXIV Legislatura del Regno. Tornata di Venerdì 25 luglio 1919*, 19959.

³ Quoted by R. Saage, *Der Erste Präsident. Karl Renner—eine politische Biografie* (Vienna: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 2016), 126.

Treaty, democracy seemed to be reduced to a small number of states along the shores of the North Sea.

The pre-1914 heritage of the Catholic and Socialist mass parties weighed heavily on democracy's prospects in the 1920s and 1930s. This chapter discusses their heritage, which was defined by their roots as anti-system forces defending solely the interests of working-class and confessional groups under pressure. And it demonstrates how the institutional reforms of the postwar years could add to the effect that this heritage had on already feeble democracies. These reforms did much more than merely create a system in which parties simply dominated elections. Rather, parties were, in the words of the young Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci, echoing Machiavelli, 'the modern prince', that had the 'aim of founding a new type of state' of which they were 'the only possible leaders'.⁴ It was not merely mass democracy, but a new type of state, the *Parteienstaat*, or 'party-state', as many contemporaries soon dubbed it, which came out of the War. With this concept, they intended a regime in which government was for the first time executed exclusively by the leaders of the mass parties: indeed, by those who had largely been excluded from power before. In radical contrast to the pre-war regimes, the postwar party-states were regimes that '*can no longer function without the decisive cooperation of parties*', as one critic put it.⁵ But precisely this dependency made these new regimes vulnerable to the question whether parties could shed their nineteenth-century anti-system heritage and break out of the confines of the specific support groups that rallied for them.

The postwar institutional reforms that moulded democracy in the shape of the 'party-state' created new and high expectations of parties—expectations that they had often difficulty to meet because of their pre-1914 legacies. To understand why, it is necessary to briefly sketch this pre-history. A 'party' at the beginning of the nineteenth century still signified, in the words of the British philosopher Edmund Burke 'a body of men' that agreed on 'a particular principle', or, in other words, people with shared opinions and interests who temporarily aligned to fight for a particular issue. The mass parties that emerged during the final third of the century were, however, something rather different. Pioneering in Germany with the formation of, first, the SPD and then the Catholic Centre Party, and then mushrooming across the continent in the following years, they had members who felt they belonged to the same group with permanently shared interests. They met in party branches (or 'sections'), situated in community centres in the

⁴ A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 133–47.

⁵ O. Koellreutter, *Die politischen Parteien im modernen Staate* (Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1926), 86. My emphasis.

neighbourhood and in factories. Here, they not only discussed political issues or listened to lectures, but also came to unwind, play card games, and read party newspapers. Most members also joined sports and cultural organizations affiliated to parties. Parties were no longer loose and temporary alliances but, as the French scholar Maurice Duverger dubbed them afterwards, ‘mass parties’ with professional permanent organizations and large bureaucracies. Indeed, as one leading French politician asserted, and in sharp contrast to Burke’s assertion a century earlier, ‘politics is partly belief. But to manifest itself usefully, faith must discipline itself in the direction of parties. These must be strongly organized.’⁶

The ‘mass party’ seemed the perfect match for a time when ever more people demanded to be politically involved and represented. And it seemed perfectly suited to contest the economic and political privileges of a small group of elites of conservative and liberal politicians, industrialists, major landowners, kings, and aristocrats who were reluctant at best to share power. These often saw the emergence of the new organizational form of the mass party as a threat. If these elites organized in parties at all, they were not ‘strongly organized’, but more of the Burkean variety: temporary electoral alliances which enabled local notables to direct their clientele to the ballot booth. Rather than the notion that mass parties were essential and legitimate organizations with which the people expressed their will, the ideal of ‘parliamentarianism’ organized their political thinking.⁷ This was the notion that the political system and the state were un-partisan: parliament represented the will of the people as a whole (even if the majority of the people could not vote) and MP’s should therefore not be tied to parties. Partisan divisions should have no place in parliament, nor in other state institutions. The German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck had the opinion that ‘political parties are the decay of the state, the decay of the future’.⁸

The relationships between the nascent Catholic and Socialist parties and the state in many Western European countries was therefore generally one of mutual hostility.⁹ Before 1914, politics used to be, at least formally, not based on mass parties, but on the principle that their influence over the political process (government formation, organization and contestation of elections, function, and organization of parliament) should be limited. The pre-war systems of government across Europe, however different, were all to greater or lesser extent geared against organized parties, both in terms of their political culture as well as their formal institutions. Obviously, in most countries, nascent mass parties were

⁶ Pierre Deluns-Montaud, cited with R. Huard, *La naissance du parti politique en France* (Paris: Presses de Sciences-Po, 1996), 227.

⁷ Manin, *The Principles*, ch. 6.

⁸ Cited with N. Lammert, *Adenauer Lecture an de Universität Köln 9.5.2017*, 2. Found on https://portal.uni-koeln.de/sites/uni/images/Aktuell/adenauer_lecture/2017/2017adenauerlecture_lammert.pdf.

⁹ See on the anti-party political culture in Western Europe in this period P. Ignazi, *Party and Democracy. The Uneven Road to Party Legitimacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 59–100.

excluded from the formation of governments—which was held firmly in the hands of liberal and conservative elites. But these elites also used all kinds of other rules to stop the advent of mass parties. They enacted strict censorship and association laws to prevent political parties from gathering a mass following. In France's Third Republic, which knew universal male suffrage and responsibility before parliament, political 'clubs' were illegal until the 1880s. Political parties were only formally allowed to form after a new law on political associations was enacted in 1901 (the first party founded then, the Radical Party, was committed to the defence of republican values which guarded mass party organization with suspicion and disdain). In Austria, association laws were even so strict that the Socialist party leader Victor Adler remarked that:

we have party comrades, but we actually do not have party members. We cannot have them, because association laws are so outdated that they do not allow to unite in political associations... Or course we could circumvent them, but that would miss the crucial point that we cannot build our entire organisation this way.¹⁰

Also the electoral system and parliamentary regulations expressed the principle that parliamentary deputies were elected on an individual ticket and represented the nation as a whole rather than a particular group. Elections were held with a first-past-the-post system in which candidates of mass parties could be side-lined and gerrymandering was common. Moreover, the electoral ballots were not allowed to figure party symbols which served to underline that parties had no formal role in elections. And finally, the parliamentary orders did not recognize parliamentary groups that corresponded to parties. This was another sign that parliament should not be a party arena but an assembly of deputies who—at least in theory—freely made decisions.

However, the hostility between the regimes of before the War and the proponents of mass parties was mutual. A major reason for the inability of mass parties to conceive of their role more broadly and move beyond the model of the mass party after 1918 was that their own party traditions often impeded such a transformation. The fact that the principles of the founding moment of parties continues to affect them for decades has long been established when it comes to the way that they are organized.¹¹ But this counts also for their identity and the way they conceived of their own function in the political system. Of course, the Socialist and

¹⁰ V. Adler, 'Victor Adler am Parteitag 1907', in *Verein für Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung, Organisationsreform in der SPÖ. Beiträge zu ihrer historischen Entwicklung. Dokumentation* (Vienna: Medieninhaber, 1992), 1.

¹¹ The notion that the way parties organized themselves followed from their genesis, even long after their creation, was one of the key points of A. Panebianco, *Political Parties. Organisation and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

Catholic parties that emerged in the final third of the nineteenth century differed in many respects. They did even often consider each other as archenemies. Nonetheless, they shared three important features that became obstacles to the transformation into people's parties in the 1920s.

First, both Socialist and Catholic mass parties started their lives as outsiders with a deeply rooted anti-system mentality. For them, politics was about the mobilization of neatly defined social and cultural groups that they claimed were being marginalized. Therefore, they made very explicit that the reason for their existence was the defence of those groups, and those groups only. Nothing made this clearer than the founding of what was arguably the first modern mass party in Europe: the General German Workers Association—the predecessor to the SPD, established in 1863. Its first president, the philosopher and activist Ferdinand Lasalle, argued that 'the working class must constitute itself as an independent political party [because] only the representation of the working class in the legislative bodies of Germany can satisfy its legitimate interests'.¹² The party was to be explicitly a group for workers only. Indeed, its statutes decided that 'every German worker can become a member of the organization . . . The party board will decide whether someone is a worker in the sense of our organization.'¹³

In other words, these parties started their lives as outsiders, because they represented neatly defined groups under pressure. Socialists felt this marginalization in the form of anti-strike legislation, anti-Socialist laws such as those of Bismarck which crippled working-class organizations and the banning of their parties, such as happened with the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) in 1894 under the pretext of a crackdown on anarchist activities. Likewise, Catholics felt that their entitlements were jeopardized. The German empire saw itself as a protestant nation, and Bismarck soon started the so-called Culture Wars against the Catholic minority to prove this, asserting the supremacy of the state above religious authorities in family affairs, hurting several Catholic orders, and expelling the clergy from the classroom. The Culture Wars 'broke off' the integration of Catholics in the new regime,¹⁴ and had a spin-off in Austria too. For French governments, combatting the influence of the Church was essential to its mission to secure the republic against any monarchical influences.¹⁵ These attempts culminated in the law of 1905 which strictly separated Church and state, legalized

¹² F. Lassalle, 'Offenes Antwortschreiben vom 1. März 1863', in S. Miller and H. Potthoff, eds, *Kleine Geschichte der SPD. Darstellung und Dokumentation 1848–1990* (Bonn: Dietz Verlag, 1991), 327–9: 327.

¹³ Allgemeinen Deutschen Arbeitervereins, *Statut der Allgemeinen Deutschen Arbeitervereins* (Frankfurt am Main: Baist, 1863), art. 2.

¹⁴ K.-E. Lönne, *Politischer Katholizismus im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Wehler, 1986), 172.

¹⁵ For a background to the separation between Church and State in France see R. Gibson, 'Why Republicans and Catholics Couldn't Stand Each Other in the Nineteenth Century', in F. Tallett and N. Atkin, eds, *Religion, Society and Politics in France* (London and Rio Grande: The Hambledon Press, 1991), 107–20.

divorce, removed religious oaths in trials, and scrapped all kinds of state subsidies to the Church. Italy did not go that far, but governments here also introduced the civil marriage, restricted Catholic influence over education and asserted state control over the Church charity organizations. They also expropriated significant portions of Church property, while the fact that Italian unification was achieved by stripping the Pope of all his secular authority within the territories of the Italian state antagonized many Catholics here—and, of course, the successive Popes themselves.

Second, this perceived marginalization stimulated both Socialists and Catholics to pioneer with new the mass party form of political organization.¹⁶ The SPD remained for a long time the emblematic model of what a 'mass party' should be. Their followers were united in a closely knit group that partied at the SPD's own holidays and festivities, read the Socialist newspapers, and enthusiastically joined its affiliated social, cultural, and sports organizations. Especially in its heartland of the heavily industrialized Ruhr area of western Germany and the Saxony region in the east, the SPD's influence touched all spheres of life of its members and their families.¹⁷ The SPD served as an inspiration for sister parties across the border, such as the PSI, founded in 1892, the Austrian Socialist Party and the 'French Section of the Workers International' (SFIO).¹⁸ Also for Catholic parties, German party politics seemed to be ahead of the rest of the continent.¹⁹ The main motivation for the foundation of the German Centre Party was the defence of the rights of Catholics in the predominantly protestant empire. Or, as the party phrased preparing for the first empire-wide elections, 'at the next elections the Catholic people need more than ever a decisive and determined representative'.²⁰

¹⁶ Which made them arguably 'ghettoparties': Ignazi, *Party and Democracy*, 75. There is a rich body of literature on emerging party politics and democratization in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe, most of it concerned with national cases. For a broader perspective on the (perception and contestation of) party organization. H. te Velde and M. Janse, eds, *Organizing Democracy. Reflections on the Rise of Political Organizations in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) provide various national perspectives in one volume. For Germany, see D. Dowe, J. Kocka, and H. A. Winkler, eds, *Parteien im Wandel vom Kaiserreich zur Weimarer Republik* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1999) and M. L. Anderson, *Practicing Democracy. Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), for France see Huard, *La naissance du parti politique*; and R. Rémond, *La République souveraine. La vie politique en France 1879–1939* (Paris: Fayard, 2002); for Italy, S. Rogari, *Alle origini del trasformismo. Partiti e Sistema politico nell'Italia liberale* (Bari: Laterza, 1998) and F. Cammarano, *Storia dell'Italia liberale* (Bari: Laterza, 2011).

¹⁷ For the early SPD see in particular J. Retallack, *Red Saxony. Election Battles and the Spectre of Democracy in Germany, 1860–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹⁸ M. Ridolfi, *Il PSI e la nascita del partito di massa. 1892–1922* (Bari: Laterza, 1992); K. Misgeld, K. Molling, and K. Amark, eds, *Creating Social Democracy. A Century of the Social Democratic Labor Party of Sweden* (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).

¹⁹ J. W. Boyer, 'Catholics, Christians and the Challenges of Democracy: The Heritage of the Nineteenth Century', in W. Kaiser and H. Wohnout, eds, *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918–1945* (London: Routledge, 2004), 7–41: 11. See also S. N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996).

²⁰ H. Lepper, ed., *Volk, Kirche und Vaterland. Wahlaufrufe, Aufrufe, Satzungen und Statuten des Zentrums 1870–1933. Eine Quellensammlung zur Geschichte insbesondere der Rheinische und Westfälische Zentrumsparthei* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1998), 158.

In Austria, the Christian Social Party made headway in the 1890s against the prudent efforts of political elites to liberalize the Habsburg empire.²¹ In France and Italy, by contrast, Catholic parties were not established until after the First World War. The Third Republic suffered from 'bitter ideological conflicts' which seemed at times like an 'ongoing Franco-French war' between the right and republicans.²² And because anti-republican groups often prided themselves on their Catholic identity, the margins for a more moderate Catholic political party in France were small. South of the Alps, the formation of a Catholic party was equally problematic. While the Pope's countless former *palazzi* in the eternal city were converted into ministries of the new Italian state, he retaliated by prohibiting the active participation of Catholics in Italian politics, thwarting initiatives in this direction (even though, in 1905, he told them to 'prepare' for the moment their participation would be needed).

Marginalization thus stimulated Catholics and Socialists to build powerful and close-knit organizations. These organizations tied their resistance to existing rulers often to cries for universal (male) suffrage and other political reforms. However, precisely because they were outsiders and, in many places, almost by their nature relegated to opposition, both Catholics and Socialists were ambivalent towards parliamentary institutions in general and to governing in them in particular. This is the third characteristic they shared which complicated their transformation into people's parties. Catholic government participation was of course difficult to imagine in France and Italy, while only early in the twentieth century, the Centre Party moved somewhat closer to supporting German governments. Among Socialists, resistance was even stronger. Not a single Socialist politician in Europe governed with the support of their party before 1914, because, in the words of a French socialist leader, 'the day that the Socialist Party will practice the class struggle by sharing political power with the capitalist class is the day when socialism will no longer exist'.²³ The Second International even adopted a motion against Socialist parties governing in a bourgeois setting.

This stance on governing also concealed suspicions towards the institutions of parliamentary democracy. Even a non-revolutionary Socialist such as Karl Renner in Austria degradingly talked about 'bourgeois' democracy to denote its parliamentary form, as opposed to the 'true' democracy of the socialists which came with a complete re-foundation of society. On the eve of the First World War, the SFIO stated that 'because of the consequences of its errors, bourgeois democracy

²¹ J. W. Boyer, *Political Radicalism in Late Imperial Vienna. The Origins of the Christian Social Movement 1848-1897* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981).

²² J. McMillan, 'Introduction: Republic and the Nation in the *belle époque*', in J. McMillan, ed., *Modern France 1880-2002* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1-11: 5.

²³ Quoted by A. Bergounioux and G. Grunberg, *L'ambition et le remords. Les socialistes français et le pouvoir (1905-2005)* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), 47.

is being cornered'.²⁴ Likewise, the strife for free universal suffrage which was brought forward by some Catholic parties could not conceal the ambiguous stance of many of them had towards liberal institutions in general, and democracy in the liberal-democratic sense of the term in particular. With 'democracy' most intended a dedication to serve the interests of their followers, other than that a commitment to parliamentary principles. They stood often only half-hearted to parliamentary democracy at best, with the Austrian Christian Social Party's commitment to the Church and the emperor, hardly two bastions of democracy, or the Belgian Catholic Party's introduction of a voting system which allowed affluent citizens more political power, as fine illustrations.

So, while political Catholicism and socialism had many differences, their early histories mirrored each other in important ways which complicated their contribution to the stabilization of democracy once this became the norm as form of government after 1918. They claimed to defend only the interests, rights, and identities of groups under pressure. They both claimed adherence to universal rather than national values or ideologies: cross-border class solidarity and the universal Catholic faith. And they were natural outsiders as well as parties of opposition of the anti-system kind.

The War turned the mass parties from outsiders to insiders. By the end of the War, regime change seemed inevitable and everywhere change went in the direction of democratic reforms, often stimulated and addressed by the politicians of mass parties who had been excluded from power before. In Germany this occurred with the spectre of a communist coup, the establishment (and suppression) of council republics across the country, a hasty exile of the emperor and chaotic scenes in the capital as the government of SPD-leader Friedrich Ebert tried to assert its authority. But the German case did not stand alone. Even though often in less dramatic circumstances, a similar transfer of power from liberal and conservative elites to representatives of mass parties took place across the continent. Barely forty-eight hours after the declaration of the German republic, eight centuries of Habsburg rule came to an end in Vienna. As the emperor left the capital in the imperial train heading for the Swiss border, Renner's Social Democratic Workers Party of Austria (SDAPÖ) and the Christian Social Party declared a republic in Austria. Also in the victor nations, the advent of mass democracy and the reinforcement of parties went hand in hand. The end of the War was the call to action for Luigi Sturzo to establish the Italian People's Party (PPI). Together with the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), the PPI defeated the liberal elites who had governed Italy ever since its unification at the next elections. Even

²⁴ S.F.I.O., *Élections législatives de 1910. Aux Travailleurs de France* (Paris, 1910).

in France, parties now explicitly came to dominate politics, casting doubt over the revolutionary myth of an indivisible republic in which parliament was not separated by partisan divisions. Rather, the dominance of parties made the Third Republic of the Interwar years radically different from the one that was established in the 1870s.²⁵ The same counted for Belgium, where the wartime government of national unity continued and Socialists confirmed their place at the government table from which they had always been excluded, and for Sweden, where the Swedish Socialist Workers Party (SAP) for the first time became part of a government in 1917, while they delivered the prime minister three years later.

The First World War thus broke the taboo on government participation of Socialists and Catholic party politicians which had, to a greater or lesser extent, been the norm before 1914. But the changes that made these post-1918 regimes 'party-states' were much more fundamental than this. The aftermath of the War was one of the major moments of constitution writing in modern European history, comparable with the wave after 1848 and the one after the Second World War. This obviously counted for the new republics in Central Europe which emerged on the rubbles of the German and Austrian empires. But it counted for Germany and Austria themselves too, while the political reforms in countries such as the Netherlands and Italy were so far-reaching that also here they are considered founding moments in their constitutional history.²⁶ After having often been in opposition since their founding in the late nineteenth century, Socialist and Catholic parties capitalized on the opportunities this offered them. They wanted to reform political institutions so that these no longer rejected mass parties but endorsed them as the foundations on which democracy could be built. New laws should express the principle that democracy could not survive without mass parties. Anti-party states should be turned into party-states.

This understanding that democracy was, for better or worse, necessarily party democracy was the dominant view among members of the commissions who prepared the new German and Austrian constitutions.²⁷ Renner personally prepared the document that formed the blueprint of the Austrian constitution. He closely collaborated with Hans Kelsen, later one of Europe's foremost legal scholars and then already one of the staunchest defenders of the virtues of party democracy. Kelsen boldly stated that 'modern democracy is built on political

²⁵ D. Hanley, *Party, Society, Government. Republican Democracy in France* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), 108–17.

²⁶ S. Noiret, *La nascita del Sistema dei partiti nell'Italia contemporanea. La proporzionale del 1919* (Rome: Pietro Lacaita editore, 1994); N. Antonetti, *Sturzo, i Popolari e le riforme istituzionali del primo dopoguerra* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1988); J. Loots, *Voor het Volk, van het Volk. Van districtenstelsel naar evenredige vertegenwoordiging* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2004).

²⁷ For the position of parties in the (preparation of the) writing of the German and Austrian postwar constitutions see H. Bollmeyer, *Der steinige Weg zur Demokratie. Die Weimarer Nationalversammlung zwischen Kaiserreich und Republik* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2007); S.-Y. Song, *Politische Parteien und Verbände in der Verfassungsrechtslehre der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin: Dunker und Humboldt, 1996) and Saage, *Der erste Präsident*.

parties, and the more powerful they are, the stronger the principle of democracy has been realized'.²⁸ In Germany, the preparation committee included esteemed liberal thinkers Hugo Preuß and Max Weber. Both accepted that parties were badly needed to unite the different political views of citizens and translate these into coherent government action.²⁹ Indeed, Weber answered party critics that they might 'complain moralistically about the existence of parties, about the way they canvass support and conduct their campaigns and the fact that minorities inevitably have the power to determine programmes and lists of candidates, but it is not possible to eliminate [them]...without destroying the existence an active popular assembly'.³⁰

Such views on political parties found expression in new rules that reversed the official disapproval of mass parties in regulations of parliament, elections, and government that had been characteristic of regimes before 1914. The foundation of the party-state was arguably the reform of the electoral system. From some form of first-past-the-post system, virtually all countries on the continent now switched to proportional representation, while France adopted a system which aimed to 'combine the merits of proportional representation with those of the majority system'.³¹ Proportional representation can only function with parties that have the organizational muscle to fight elections across the country rather than in small districts. Moreover, as no single party stood a chance of winning a majority, governments were necessarily party coalitions, which strengthened the hand of party boards outside parliament that had to negotiate coalition agreements. For this reason, politicians at the time considered proportional representation vital for their ambition to make parties central to democracy. Ebert declared that the elections for the National Assembly would be held with proportional representation just a day after the armistice. Renner called the system 'an essential characteristic of true democracy'.³² Similarly, when the Italian parliament adopted it a few months later, Filippo Turati, the founder of the PSI, made clear that the 'virtue of the reform lies in the new conditions that it creates... *it will be better to create parties where there are no parties yet*... as without parties and without

²⁸ H. Kelsen, *Von Wesen und Wert der Demokratie* (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1963 [1929]), 18.

²⁹ H. te Velde, 'The Domestication of a Machine: The Debate about Political Parties around 1900', in Te Velde and Janse, eds, *Organizing Democracy*, 255–75: 268. See also: R. Bellamy, 'The Advent of the Masses and the Making of the Modern Theory of Democracy', in R. Bellamy and T. Ball, eds, *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 70–103.

³⁰ M. Weber, 'Parliament and Government under a New Political Order' (1919), in M. Weber, *Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 130–271: 150.

³¹ A. McLaren Carstairs, *A Short History of Electoral Systems in Western Europe* (London: Routledge, 1980), 178.

³² Cited by R. Owerdieck, 'Der Verfassungsbeschluss der Provisorischen Nationalversammlung Deutscherlands vom 30 Oktober 1918', in *Die österreichische Verfassung von 1918 bis 1938. Protokoll des Symposiums in Wien am. 19 Oktober 1977* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1980), 75–89: 87.

programmes, elections are meaningless and parliament does not exist'.³³ The French prime minister Auguste Briand stated that 'only with a less personal voting system', France would be able to 'rise above the petty quarrels of yesterday and face the great questions that the restoration of our country depends on'.³⁴

So proportional representation led to party government. But it led to other reforms too that now formally expressed what had become practice already, namely that elections were no means to select MP's who represented the general interest, but a means to decide on the power relations between parties. The prohibition of ballots figuring references to parties were now considered outdated. The German National Assembly debated a case during a local election in Berlin, where ballot papers had (still against the rules) figured the SPD-symbol, concluding that 'it would be recommendable to print on future ballots "list of the social democratic party, list of the German people's party", etc., so that voters are fully informed'.³⁵ This meant that in the future the electoral regulations declared that 'on the ballot paper the name of the party should appear on the place of the name [of the candidate] or next to it'.³⁶ Likewise, new parliamentary orders decided that parliament was no neutral forum where deputies represented the general interest, but a party arena where deputies defended the party line and defended the groups that had voted for them. They obliged deputies to become part of a parliamentary faction that corresponded to parties (those who refused were often obliged to become part of a 'mixed group', or the 'group of savages', as some called them).³⁷ These factions now had a formal role in the parliamentary hierarchy, for instance in allowing speaking time, filing motions, and deciding the membership of commissions where all-important preparatory work was done. Even in France, with its myth of the indivisible assembly, such groups became reality: an order adopted in 1910 that established parliamentary groups was considered insufficient because it allowed for too many independent MPs. It was therefore adapted so that 'groups that are recognized have to deposit a party programme, a political declaration, shared by all their members, signed by them and in place of an electoral programme'.³⁸

³³ Filippo Turati in *Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei deputati, XXIV Legislatura del Regno. Tornata di Venerdì 26.7.1919*, p. 20009-11. My emphasis.

³⁴ Cited by G. Stuart, 'Electoral Reform in France', *American Political Science Review* 14.1 (1920), 117-23: 119.

³⁵ *Verhandlungen des deutschen Reichstags, Nationalversammlung*, 56. Sitzung, 14.7.1919, 1528. See also P. Corduener, 'Democracy and the Entanglement of Political Parties and the State. Party-State Relations in Twentieth-Century France, Italy, and Germany', *Comparative Political Studies* 53.1 (2020), 40-70: 48-50.

³⁶ *Reichswahlgesetz 1922*, art. 24.

³⁷ G. Ambrosini, *Partiti politici e gruppi parlamentari dopo la proporzionale* (Florence: La Voce, 1921), 28.

³⁸ The first order was enacted in 1910, the adaption in 1932, see P. Arrighi, *Le statut des partis politiques* (Paris: Libraire général de droit et de jurisprudence, 1948), 15-16.

The electoral and parliamentary reforms of the immediate postwar years crafted democracy in the mould of a party-state. Government formation, elections, and parliamentary representation now formally centred around parties. Contemporary observers were fascinated by the sharp contrasts between the regimes prior to 1914 and those of their own age. There were plenty of critics who longed nostalgically for a world that was lost. But there were also many who welcomed the changes. Gasparre Ambrosini, private assistant to the Italian Prime Minister during the peace negotiations at Versailles, and a prominent Catholic legal scholar, observed that thanks to the electoral and parliamentary reforms, 'the deputy can no longer remain isolated, but has to become part of a group, just like the voter must join a party according to [the logic of] the new electoral law'.³⁹ Similarly, the German thinker Heinrich Triepel, concluded that the 'parliamentary orders have started to recognize party life . . . The representative is no longer a representative of the people, but only a representative of their party. They feel as such and act as such.'⁴⁰ Triepel's most gifted student (and future president of the West German Constitutional Court) Gerhard Leibholz observed that mass parties now embodied the state to such an extent that 'one starts to doubt the identity of party and state'.⁴¹ With such formulations, observers captured the essence of the party-state. Indeed, Kelsen argued that 'democracy is necessarily a party-state'. Before 1918, laws had 'ignored political parties or even disapproved of them', but now, 'democracy is built on political parties', as parties were in fact 'organs that form the will of the state'.⁴²

But precisely because the entire system now hinged on parties, the question whether mass parties would be able to provide hard-needed stability was more important than ever. The party-state was a daunting political experiment conducted in an extremely volatile geopolitical and social climate. Its success depended on the ability of parties to build broader social alliances than they used to do. They also had to govern effectively and cohesively—and defend necessary compromises to their supporters. The party-state thus put new and high expectations on parties and required of them to play a radically different role than before 1914. This cruelly laid bare the fundamental tension that lay at the heart of democracy as it took shape after 1918: the parties that were now supposed to jointly provide stable government and had together to manage an unprecedented series of political, economic, and international crises were the same parties that still represented social groups that stood increasingly opposite each

³⁹ Ambrosini, *Partiti politici*, 30–1.

⁴⁰ H. Triepel, *Die Staatsverfassung der politischen Parteien* (Berlin Preußische Druckerei- und Verlags Aktiengesellschaft, 1927), 13–14. See also: Corduwener, 'The Entanglement', 50.

⁴¹ G. Leibholz, *Das Wesen der Repräsentation unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Repräsentativsystems. Ein Beitrag zur allgemeinen Staats und Verfassungslehre* (Berlin and Leipzig: Walter De Gruyter, 1929), 122.

⁴² Kelsen, *Von Wesen und Wert*, 18–20.

other in the countless clashes that marked the political life in Europe. Moreover, they were the same parties that had for decades built their identities on waging opposition against 'the system', however defined, and, to make matters even more complicated, against each other. The major question was whether they could overcome these legacies.

2

Blueprints of the People's Party and the Challenge of Polarization in the 1920s

With the breakthrough of mass democracy in the aftermath of the First World War the party-state became the new political reality. This was a system in which mass parties almost everywhere for the first time took on government responsibility in a system based on universal suffrage and responsibility of governments before parliament. It was also a system in which key institutions such as parliament, elections, and the government could no longer function without parties and formally centred on them. The power of Catholic and Socialist parties was confirmed in the first postwar elections. In many countries, Socialist parties made an electoral breakthrough. They became the largest force in Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and Norway (and the second biggest in France). Also Catholic parties fared well. They became the second biggest party in Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Austria and the biggest in the Netherlands. The broad support of the mass parties added to the expectation that the party-state would usher in a period of reforms and high political legitimacy in which the gap between people and elites that had become so wide before 1914 would finally be bridged.

But while leaders of mass parties had striven successfully for the reform of political institutions of the party-state the key question was now if they could also re-invent themselves. The party-state required parties to play a different role than before. It needed parties that no longer primarily represented different social groups, because party political polarization now immediately impacted political stability. It required parties also to bridge divisions and ease social tensions. And the easiest way to do so would be to broaden their own social base beyond their original working-class or Catholic supporters. The question whether parties could make such a transformation preoccupied contemporaries from the start. Preuß warned that 'party competition in a democracy is only about taking complete political responsibility for the state', rather than about parties serving their 'self-interest'.¹ Indeed, he noted that in the party-state, 'democracy governs through parties', which meant that parties:

¹ H. Preuß, 'Nationale Demokratie' (1920), in H. Preuß, *Gesammelte Schriften. Vierter Band. Politik und Verfassung in der Weimarer Republik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 151–4: 153.

now have the full responsibility for the power of the state. This is precisely what competition between parties in a democracy is about: parties cannot only be there for their own sake; they are instruments to achieve objectives for the nation [at large]. Therefore, a democracy cannot be governed if parties do not give unconditional priority to the general interests over any other possible interests.²

Parties should, in other words, move beyond the representation of fixed groups only. Only under that condition, the experiment of the 'party-state' had a chance of success.

The plea of Preuß did not stand on itself. Also among party politicians there was a growing conviction that to combat the social polarization that threatened to wreck feeble democracies in the 1920s Catholic and Socialist parties should shed their nineteenth-century heritage and break out of the confines of their traditional support base. This chapter explores ideas of pioneering politicians about such broad-based people's parties and shows why they often failed to materialize in practice. It therefore first demonstrates how the notion that mass parties should engage their rank-and-file members continuously became even stronger pronounced than before 1914, leading contemporaries to talk about 'integration parties' that cared for supporters from 'the cradle to the grave'. It then proceeds by discussing how this understanding of the role of parties was contested by influential voices inside and outside parties who claimed that it was vital that parties no longer acted as representatives of working-class or Catholic supporters only. In some states, such as Sweden, these appeals were actually successful. But in many other places, the traditions of the nineteenth century that went against them weighed heavily. Rather than shedding their nineteenth-century heritage as mass parties devoting their energies to the defence of single groups, the identity of Socialist and Catholic parties remained fundamentally unchanged so that they still mainly fulfilled the first characteristic of the people's party: rallying and organizing people from below. This narrow conception of what political parties should do in novel democracies fed polarization and hurt democratic legitimacy and stability in the 1920s.

In contrast to all the constitutional reforms of the immediate aftermath of the War, the way the mass parties conceived of their role in the political system was most of all marked by continuity. This was perhaps most clearly visible in the way they devoted most of their energies to representing and defending the interests of their core group of supporters. Socialists and Catholics continued to carry the heritage of their genesis as anti-system forces battling for the emancipation of the

² Ibid.

marginalized groups they represented. And, as, in their view, party democracy was about permanent mobilization, parties wasted their efforts not so much on trying to convince opponents but spent them rather on rallying their own supporters in the greatest numbers and with the greatest possible dedication.

The way their organizations operated testified to this 'counterworld' legacy.³ They aimed to control the social, cultural, and private lives of their followers. To do so, they recruited sympathizers from an early age onwards, determined to swell their army of militants and in this way conquer power. The future Austrian Socialist Chancellor Bruno Kreisky recalled how this recruitment worked in practice in the 1920s. His recollection would surely have sound familiar to many of his contemporaries. Kreisky remembered that he participated in a demonstration for the first time 'when I was fourteen years old' and that he then soon joined 'the association of socialist middle school students. Because I was very young, I belonged to the hiking group that had an enormous influence on the life of thousands of people and was split in many ways: there were Catholic, German-national, liberal, and socialist-communist branches.' As he became older and more politically engaged, 'joining the [Socialist] Party was a self-evident formality for me'. He attended party events, and soon made his first, 'very political, class-struggle-ish, and anti-religious' speech'.⁴ He rose quickly through the ranks of the party, overcoming the suspicion of some of his party members because of his bourgeois background and became one of the youngest Socialist leaders in the 1920s.

Kreisky was exemplary for an entire generation that came of age politically in the 1920s as they grew up, sometimes almost literally, under the roof of the various party organizations. Party fortunes were made and broken by the ability to realize continuous and committed involvement of party followers. Even more so than before 1914, the Socialist and Catholic parties successfully organized the entire social and cultural life of their members inside party associations. One of the pioneers of party scholarship, the German political scientist Sigmund Neumann, coined the term 'integration party' to describe how parties 'integrated' people's lives entirely inside the party: free time, schooling, news gathering, sports, culture, and political debates all happened inside the party and its auxiliary organizations. Parties cared for their supporters 'from the cradle to the grave' as he called it. This party type placed 'incomparably greater demands on people. Basically, it requires the integration of the whole person in the political organization, not only through constant membership, but above all through their intervention in all areas of life', he observed.⁵

³ Ignazi, *Party and Democracy*, 75.

⁴ B. Kreisky, *Zwischen den Zeiten. Erinnerungen aus fünf Jahrzehnten* (Vienna: Siedler 1986), 103, 118.

⁵ S. Neumann, *Die Parteien der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: Wohlkammer GmbH, 1965 [1932]), 105.

The SPD remained the prime example of such an 'integration party'.⁶ It could obviously build on its efforts to foster a strong working-class subculture before 1914 and reinforced its efforts to leave its mark on Germany's social and cultural scene. The Socialists published numerous newspapers, leaflets, and brochures, had their own press agency, and ran a chain of book shops. Party officials also launched a range of educational initiatives to instruct the working class, including evening schools and lecture series on any topic from world history to classical music. The party also boasted its own welfare institute supporting families in need. But the most popular initiatives of the SPD's attempt to rally the entire working-class behind its principles were massive sports and culture events organized by its affiliate organizations. The appeal of these organizations lay most of all in their promise to provide affordable fun and entertainment. But the party's aim of uniting Socialist militants and feeding them with party propaganda about the class struggle was never far away. These events always had the agenda to foster a strong sense of group identity. Its sport association, with 700,000 members stated that:

a working-class sportsperson cannot belong to a bourgeois association As a working-class sportsperson, you should only read the working-class press as it permanently provides you with everything you need to know. And if you become a sport fanatic then you should know that working-class sports, is only a means to an aim, to make the working class as a whole stronger and more flexible. The entire bourgeois sports movement is the opponent of the class-conscious working class.⁷

The SPD's efforts were mirrored by Socialist parties elsewhere. The PSI realized that rallying their followers was not just a matter of stern speeches at meetings and alarming articles in the party paper. It offered their followers entertainment and leisure, because also workers 'want regattas, skating, swimming, mountain climbing, football, for all. Striving also for these pleasures is perfectly compatible with our programme'.⁸ Indeed, organizing the free time of members and waging political propaganda were seen as two sides of the same coin and various initiatives from 'theatre of the people' to 'red cyclists' saw the light in an attempt also organize the social lives of their members. The Austrian Socialists had the advantage of dominating the city council of Vienna, making the capital an 'experiment in working-class culture', with cultural organizations, newspapers, and even 'Workers Olympics'.⁹ All these forms of working-class socializations

⁶ Ibidem, 106.

⁷ Arbeiter-, Turn und Sportbundes, *Warum bist du Mitglied der Arbeiter-Turn und Sportbundes?* (Leipzig: Arbeiter-, Turn und Sportbundes, 1926), 9.

⁸ Cited with M. Ridolfi, *Il PSI e la nascita del partito di massa, 1892-1922* (Bari: Laterza, 1992), 225.

⁹ H. Gruber, *Red Vienna. Experiment in Working Class Culture, 1919-1934* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

inside party organizations remained first and foremost male forms of politics in which earlier assumptions of the position of women in politics and society proved again hard to erase. Inside Socialist parties, women were often 'typecast as "caring" auxiliaries' rather than full-fledged members.¹⁰

The 'integration party' was no Socialist monopoly. Also Catholic parties increasingly aimed to turn their entire potential Catholic voter base into a dedicated army of party members and militants. The Centre Party, for instance, was explicitly highlighted by Neumann as a key example of this new party type. With increased fervour the Centre Party aimed to make itself less dependent on the Church. It had its own affiliated newspapers and intensified ties with Christian labour unions. It also invested in a youth wing with the specific goal to 'introduce the Catholic youth to the tradition of the best time of political Catholicism'.¹¹ Likewise, Sturzo boasted at the first congress of the PPI in 1919 that the party's office had already 'approved 850 sections and 55,895 members' in the few months since its founding alone. 106,000 members still waited for their registration to be completed. A year later, the number of members had surged to 250,000 while the party allied itself with Catholic trade unions, farmers associations, rural cooperatives, and Catholic social clubs. In the party itself a women's movement was founded. Twenty daily and fifty-one weekly affiliated newspapers were published to give the party a voice of its own in the Italian public debate.¹² So although political Catholics lacked the party discipline of the Socialists and often made use of the Church's organization, they too were professionalizing their organizations with the aim of rallying constantly their supporters to come to the rescue of the Catholic cause.

The integration party offered enormous opportunities for political participation. It gave its predominantly male members a feeling of comradeship and a sense of belonging. Years later, by-then greying veteran activists still fondly remembered the sense of excitement and solidarity of the party rallies of the Interwar era. Recalling the massive demonstrations of the French Socialist Party, one of its former militants still recalled four decades later vividly the excitement and brotherhood that he felt at the time, the packed metros to the centre, leading 'at each station [to] smiles, friendly interactions, greeting newcomers who could easily guess the destination', the 'singing [of] the International and sometimes even the *Marseillaise*'. He recalled how party demos could be tiresome and harsh, leaving party members 'frozen in February, or exhausted by the heat in July, coarse and speechless, our feet covered with a thick layer of dust'. But joining the party's

¹⁰ Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 197.

¹¹ Quoted by W. Stump, *Geschichte und Organisation der Zentrumspartei in Düsseldorf 1917–1933* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1971), 135, 140.

¹² L. Sturzo, 'La costituzione, la finalità e il funzionamento del partito popolare italiano', in PPI, *Gli atti dei congressi del Partito Popolare Italiano* (Rome: Edizione Cinque Lune, 1969), 48–64: 52. See also G. de Rosa, *Storia del Partito Popolare* (Bari: Laterza, 1988).

activities always left them 'happy with true joy, -as we] realized to have been militants again'.¹³

As its main purpose was to foster a tight-knit community of militants inside party ranks, the integration party was focused mostly on itself and the question how it could defend the interests of its supporters. This allowed many people to participate in the political process and boosted the esteem of parties as key organizations of mass democracy. But it was a slim basis for the stability of democracy at large. The integration party stood hostile towards political opponents and therefore divided already feeble postwar societies. And while relatively small in comparison to the growing violence of bands of veterans and other free corps that marked the streets of Interwar Europe, also the competition between Socialist and Catholics could turn violent. The already strong tradition of anti-Marxism of the Catholic parties was boosted by massive workers' protests and strikes. Socialists at times continued to inflame deeply rooted Catholic fears of intransigent anti-clericalism. In the harshly contested Italian elections of 1919 there were violent skirmishes between Socialists and Catholics.¹⁴ The Austrian Socialists had a fiercely anti-clerical agenda, claiming that 'one cannot be a socialist and a Churchgoer at the same time' and that 'together with the classes, the altars must also fall'.¹⁵ It encouraged its followers to leave the Church and the number of people who actually did so tripled in the early 1920s. Together with Socialist displays of strength in demonstrations and strikes, this played into deeply rooted fears inside Catholic parties for what a potential take-over of power by the working class might mean for the rights of practising Catholics.

This meant, in turn, that it was difficult for Socialists and Catholics to build on the other two aspects of the people's party: forging compromises with opposing parties in government and broadening the social basis of the supporters to counter polarization. Despite some successful attempts by the PPI and Centre Party to break out of their traditional constituencies, the Catholic parties depended most of all on middle-class and rural support outside the major cities. But the social base of Socialist parties was even less diverse. Despite long discussions in their parties on a more reformist (and, by implication, more socially inclusive) direction, most of them stayed at least nominally committed to the ultimate abolition of capitalism and conceived of themselves as parties for the industrial working-class first and foremost.

¹³ H. Noguères, *La vie quotidienne en France au temps du Front populaire, 1935-1938* (Paris: Hachette, 1977), 22-6.

¹⁴ De Rosa, *Il Partito Popolare*, 30-1.

¹⁵ Quoted by K. von Klemperer, *Ignaz Seipel: Christian Statesman in Times of Crisis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 229; E. Weinzierl, 'Austria: Church, State, Politics, and Ideology, 1918-1938', in R. J. Wolff and J. K. Hoensch, eds, *Catholics, the State and the European Radical Right 1919-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 5-30: 20.

As such, their pre-1914 traditions fuelled the tensions that jeopardized juvenile democracies. Socialists had long been divided between revolutionaries and reformists, and their programmes testified to this tension. But the question whether to settle for reforms within the system or to push for more gained a new urgency as the revolutionary understanding of Marxism received an enormous boost from the Russian Revolution. For Vladimir Lenin, moderate socialism was discredited by its support of the War and its continuing compromises with bourgeois forces during four years of bloodshed. With his power at home secured, Lenin aimed to establish Communist dominance of the European Left. Western European Socialist parties that aspired to join the Comintern, the new organization of Communist parties led by the Russian one, should change their name and expel moderates from their midst. The inevitable consequence of the founding of the Comintern was a split in Socialist ranks across Europe. Sometimes this was heated but peaceful, such as at the congresses at Tours and Livorno where the French and Italian Communists split off from the Socialists. But this rupture could also be rather violent. In the chaos that followed the collapse of the German war effort and the exile of the emperor, the German Communist Party frequently clashed with Ebert, detesting his preference for parliamentary methods. Ebert's government subsequently crushed a Communist uprising in Berlin with the use of troops and the support of free corps, killing KPD-leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.¹⁶

Paradoxically, however, the rise of communism in Western Europe did not quash the debate between revolutionaries and reformists inside Socialist ranks, opening the road to moderation and a broader base. Rather, communism posed a direct challenge to the Socialist claim that they alone represented the interests of the working class. Precisely at the moment when Europe faced a massive strike wave around the turn of the 1920s, Socialist parties now suddenly faced a direct competitor for electoral support and membership cards. And as a result they became more eager to prove their working-class credentials and identity. The Austrian Socialist Party underlined this perfectly: only by veering to the far-left itself with its special blend of 'Austro-Marxism' did it manage to prevent the emergence of a viable Communist alternative to its hegemony in Vienna.¹⁷ Rather than moving towards the political centre and broadening their social base beyond the working-class, most Socialist parties thus emphasized their revolutionary credentials and working-class base even stronger than before.

There were, however, some exceptions to this trend. The Swedish Workers Party successfully managed to complete its transition into a people's party that had

¹⁶ K. Schönhoven, *Reformismus und Radikalismus. Gespaltene Arbeiterbewegung in Weimarer Sozialstaat* (Munich: DtV Verlagsgesellschaft, 1989).

¹⁷ W. Maderthaner, *Die österreichische Sozialdemokratie 1918 bis 1934* (Vienna: Talos, 1995).

already begun before 1914. This was mainly the achievement of its leader of the first hour, Hjalmar Branting. Initially following in the academic footsteps of his father, who was a professor, he changed track to become a journalist and Socialist organizer, even briefly spending time in prison because of his polemic writings. This did not make him a radical, however. Branting travelled to Germany when he was twenty-two to meet SPD-prominent Eduard Bernstein, aiming to convince the latter that Socialists should reach out to the middle classes.¹⁸ Branting's moderation was of lasting influence on the SAP, which was increasingly willing to work together with the kind of liberal and conservative parties that were detested by Socialists elsewhere. He repeatedly defended the reforms of capitalism, for instance when the SAP supported proposals to extend pension insurance and improve work protection. And he spoke with disdain of anti-system Socialists who preferred ideological purity over reforms and 'said no because of a desire to make things better for the working classes! For my part, however, I believe such a tactic to be unworthy of a mass party.' Instead, he preferred the politics of 'common sense'.¹⁹ The SAP won the first postwar Swedish elections and headed a coalition government with liberals under Branting's leadership. Marxist themes lost further ground, with the party forswearing plans of far-reaching nationalization. It focused instead on public investment programmes, social security provisions, and corporatist arrangements between capital and labour. Branting advocated 'the expansion of the party to a people's party' which turned Swedish society into a 'people's home' without injustices and privileges.²⁰

Such pleas to move beyond the mass integration party and broaden the social base of parties to strengthen democracy could also be heard among some Catholics. Sturzo's ambition had always been to integrate the Catholics in the Italian nation rather than to keep them closed in their own subculture. He had already proposed the model of the 'people's party' in Italy in a speech in his hometown on Christmas Eve 1905. To foster the integration of Italian Catholics in the liberal Italian state, a state which was established by stripping the Pope of all his worldly authority and territory, he argued that Catholics should not be represented by a party that was controlled by the Church and that was only concerned with the defence of its interests. Rather, he stated, 'Catholics... must follow the example of other parties of national life. [But] not as armed defendants

¹⁸ J. Peters, *Branting und die schwedische Sozialdemokratie* (Berlin Deutschen Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1975), 34–5.

¹⁹ Quoted by H. Tingsten, *The Swedish Social Democrats. Their Ideological Development* (Totowa, NJ: Bedminster Press, 1973), 193. See also for Branting's influence G. Gidlund, 'From Popular Movement to Political Party: Development of the Social Democratic Labor Party Organization', in Misgeld, Molling, and Amark, eds, *Creating Social Democracy*, 97–130.

²⁰ Cited by S. Berman, *The Social Democratic Moment. Ideas and Politics in the Making of Interwar Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 157. See also G. Esping-Andersen, 'The Making of a Social Democratic Welfare State', in Misgeld, Molling, and Amark, eds, *Creating Social Democracy*, 35–66: 42–3.

of religious authority, but as representatives of a national popular tendency to develop a civic way of life.' In other words, the party should enable Catholics to become part of the Italian nation as a whole. It should not represent them as a subgroup closed in itself waging opposition but should be open to all and collaborate with others to solve real day-to-day problems of Italians. Indeed, for him a narrowly defined conception of who the party stood for was irreconcilable with the greater objective of democracy and social justice.²¹

Sturzo established the PPI in early 1919 with this objective at heart. The PPI was, in Sturzo's views, a 'party of Catholics' rather than a 'Catholic party', because, 'the two terms are antithetical: Catholicism is religion, it is universal. The party is political, it is division.'²² At the party's first congress in Bologna in 1919, he asserted that 'from the start we have prevented that religion was our political doctrine and we have aimed to make clear that we are a party that works for the public life of the nation'.²³ Only one of the party programme's key points referred to Catholicism. For Sturzo, the PPI should become a party firmly committed to political as well as socioeconomic reform, such as land redistribution among peasants. This served to enhance the interclass character of the party, which initially also drew support from workers and peasants across the Italian north.

With a similar objective at heart, French Catholics united in the Popular Democratic Party (PDP) in 1924.²⁴ Just like Sturzo (who was involved in the founding of the PDP), the party presented itself as a 'party of Catholics' rather than a deliberately Catholic party. It prided itself on its unconditional support of the republic and its rejection of the various nationalist and far-right groups which prided themselves on their Catholic faith too, most notably the *Action Française*. Although conservative in its political views, this firmly set the PDP apart from the many attempts to wed Catholic politics to a reactionary and authoritarian tradition. Indeed, despite all its divisions, the PDD 'represented a break with the tradition... which assimilated Catholics to the politics of the right'.²⁵ Still, the PDP won only few votes. This was a reason for major concern, especially when the political climate in France polarized further. It appeared that precisely its aim to have a broad appeal also made it vulnerable. 'How is it possible that despite a programme that perfectly suits the political opportunities we cannot find a way to have a more decisive influence on the affairs of the country?', Francisque Gay, one

²¹ L. Sturzo, *I problemi della vita nazionale dei cattolici italiani* (Caltagirone, 1905). Found on <http://www.cattolicedemocratici.it/index.php/articoli-per-categoria/10-cattolicesimo-democratico/683-il-discorso-di-caltagirone>. See also G. de Rosa, *Luigi Sturzo* (Turin Einaudi, 1977), 120ff.

²² L. Sturzo, 'La funzione storico del partito popolare', in PPI, *Gli atti dei congressi*, 395–416: 398.

²³ Sturzo, 'La costituzione, la finalità e il funzionamento', 48.

²⁴ J.-C. Delbreil, *Centrisme et Démocratie-Chrétienne en France. Le Parti Démocrate Populaire des origines au M.R.P. 1919–1944* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1990).

²⁵ J. McMillan, 'France', in Buchanan and Conway, eds, *Political Catholicism*, 34–68: 46.

of the PDP-leaders and editors of its newspaper *L'Aube*, asked.²⁶ He concluded that it was impossible to keep the diverse potential base of French Catholicism together as 'some went to the Popular Democrats, others went further to the Left, others to the Right, many have left'.²⁷ This meant that in parliament, people with who sought to unite Catholic and republican convictions were scattered across at least six parliamentary factions, while, Gay asserted, if they were able to form a single movement this would be of major significance for French Catholicism and the republic as such. Such a group:

of undisputed republicanism, of an asserted social spirit, where a left wing, at least, would not be afraid of adopt the most boldly democratic solutions, while a right wing would be concerned above all not to break contact with these Catholic masses who must provide the vast majority. What would not be the attraction of this supergroup? Its importance on the electoral plan and on the parliamentary plan would increase from legislature to legislature. It could, it should be in a few years the strongest group of all the Parliament.²⁸

However, despite the efforts to rally such a diverse base behind the ideals of the party, the PDP remained stuck at about 4 per cent of the vote. It showed how small the margins for such a people's party were in the highly polarized climate of the day. With about 20 per cent of the vote, the PPI's electoral success was greater, but while Sturzo might have been an early pioneer in conceptualizing the people's party, inside the PPI his views were always controversial. A significant part of the Catholic movement was not so much concerned with political democracy, but with fighting socialism and protecting confessional interests. Already at the first party congress, Sturzo's aim to define the party as non-religious was challenged by many who saw the party as strictly Catholic. One prominent party organizer stated that 'when it comes to finding the best way to be Catholic, we only acknowledge one master: the Church We are the party that best responds to the spirit and tendency of the majority of Italian Catholics'.²⁹

It showed that the ideal of the people's party was difficult to maintain in a time of big social tensions and polarization. But there were still people who considered it vital for the strengthening of democracy, even in the place where such polarization ran arguably deepest and political extremism of the Left and Right was particularly strong: Germany. Also here, some Catholics and Socialists aimed to turn the mass integration parties with their narrowly defined body of followers into people's parties that stood open for all. For a moment after the War, it seemed

²⁶ F. Gay, *Pour un rassemblement des forces démocratiques d'inspiration chrétienne. Mémoire confidentiel* (Paris: Éditions de l'Aube, 1935), 6.

²⁷ Gay, *Pour un rassemblement*, 88.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁹ G. Donati, 'Cittadini e credenti' (1923), in G. Donati, *Scritti Politici II* (Rome: Edizione Cinque Lune, 1956), 61–6: 63.

as if the SPD went precisely in this direction. Under Ebert's government, the party worked together with liberals and the Centre Party and praised and practised moderation. The securing of parliamentary democracy with the adoption of the Weimar constitution seemed an aim in itself and the aspiration of a Socialist revolution lost appeal. Ebert stated briefly after the proclamation of the republic in November 1918 that 'the revolution has been accomplished'.³⁰ Without the Communists and the radical Left-wing break-away group of the Independent Socialists in its ranks, the SPD adopted a new party programme which expressed the ambition to reach out to middle-class groups.

This appeal to break out from the working-class straitjacket reflected the economic dynamism of the time. After the German government brought the hyperinflation of the early 1920s under control, the economic recovery opened prospects of upward social mobility for many workers. This seemed to contradict the Marxist prediction that the proletariat would be ever more numerous and ever poorer. One prominent SPD-intellectual therefore warned his party fellows that despite that 'we have all been raised with the expectation of an ever-growing workers army', the future might prove this Marxist prediction wrong. He calculated that the number of industrial workers in Germany rose by 12 per cent since 1907, but the number of white-collar workers grew by 111 per cent. For him, this meant that the society sharply divided in classes slowly gave way to a society 'of a few large and homogeneous classes', or, in other words, a middle-class society.³¹

The Socialist concern with these new middle classes was important for more than electoral reasons. Reaching out to these groups was important to build the kind of cross-class alliances that diminished polarization and stabilized democracy. This was, at least, the conviction of the most eloquent and enthusiastic advocate of the people's party ideal in SPD ranks: Wilhelm Sollmann. Sollmann came from a humble background of small brewers. With his family in financial trouble for much of his youth and him therefore being unable to finish high school, Sollmann was a typical example of Socialist emancipation. He educated himself in the evening hours in the People's Library of Cologne, where he got to know Socialist politicians. As a gifted orator and organizer, he swiftly made a career in the SPD and rose through its ranks as a youth organizer, journalist, and parliamentarian. Even during the political heat of the revolution of November 1918, when he was still a modest local politician in Cologne, he presented the SPD as a party that also cared for the interests of the middle class. Together with the mayor of the city, Centre Party politician Konrad Adenauer, he worked to defuse

³⁰ Cited with W. Mühlhausen, *Friedrich Ebert. Sozialdemokrat und Staatsmann* (Stuttgart: DRW Verlag, 2008), 36.

³¹ R. Lederer, 'Die Umschichtung des Proletariats und die kapitalistischen Zwischenschichten vor der Krise [1929]', in R. Lederer, *Kapitalismus, Klassenstruktur und Probleme der Demokratie in Deutschland 1910–1940. Ausgewählte Aufsätze* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 172–86: 173, 180.

tensions between Socialist protestors and the military during the height of the crisis that followed the armistice.

Sollmann's concern with avoiding polarization was central to his understanding of democracy.³² He argued that parties that only represented one social group, such as the working class, put democracy at risk. They sharpened political divisions and exacerbated social tensions. He therefore explicitly welcomed Catholics in the SPD, because, for him, it did not matter whether you fought inequality in the name of Marx, or 'in the name of Jesus or Francis of Assisi'. Only if the SPD reached beyond the working class, it could truly contribute to the stabilization of Weimar democracy. The SPD should become what he called a 'social democratic people's party' and should display more patriotism and nationalism to prevent that this was the monopoly of the nationalist right. Sollmann was also one of the leading forces behind the *Reichsbanner* organization that aimed to forge a cross-party coalition to defend the Weimar constitution against right-wing and left-wing extremes. Democracy's defence should always come before narrow party interests.

Sollmann was convinced that the legacy of the SPD's anti-system identity, crafted carefully during the German empire, impeded the transformation into such a people's party. The party had always built its identity on flatly rejecting the economic and political order of the country and before 1914 had never taken on any responsibility. It was easy to fall back on these old habits, especially when the new moderate course did not immediately produce results: the SPD was punished hard in the elections of 1920 and it preferred opposition in the coming years. But for Sollmann it was the task of the SPD to 'push back all doubts about the value of democracy among the working-class' and this could only be done by 'a will to power in democracy', or, in other words, by taking government responsibility.³³ Sollmann sharply criticized those who 'in Germany, in particular in working class circles, prefer to vote a party whose members promise not to hold public office until their death'. Instead, the party should embrace government responsibility, and the compromises with opponents that were necessarily part of it, wholeheartedly, and 'to be ready to enter coalitions that serve democratic and social progress'.³⁴

Sollmann's plea for the people's party in the SDP was echoed by that of an influential voice inside the Centre Party at the same time: Adam Stegerwald. Stegerwald came also of modest background, and originally was a carpenter by profession. He made a quick career in the Christian trade unions and then became the face of the left wing of the Centre Party. Just as Sollmann had observed that the

³² S. Ebert, *Wilhelm Sollmann. Sozialist—Demokrat—Weltbürger (1881–1951)* (Bonn: Dietz Verlag, 2014).

³³ W. Sollmann, 'Volkswohl in Volksstaat', in *Das Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold* (Magdenburg: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaft, 1924), 11–15: 13.

³⁴ Cited with Ebert, *Wilhelm Sollmann*, 191, 200.

strict oppositional and working-class character of his party was an obstacle to the stabilization of Weimar democracy, Stegerwald aimed to abandon the specific Catholic nature of his own party. He argued for a union of Catholics and Protestants in the same party to strengthen democracy.³⁵ But his plans went further than that and included alliances between social groups under the wings of the Centre Party. For Stegerwald it was a 'big construction error' that 'party life is made by agrarian and middle-class views'. He warned that 'we need a different party atmosphere in many ways . . . The goals of the Centre Party should be as follows: as political party it should focus its work and thinking on the tasks of the state and its inner- and outer requirements. As party of the political centre it should search for a balance of voters of both conservative and liberal conviction. . . . If it embraces all sections [of the population] it will have the character of a people's party.'³⁶ This also meant that the party should take a different stance on the Socialists. Although before 1914, the 'Socialist working class has matured against the people, bourgeois society and the state' these days were over, and now 'the working-class is ever more a decisive part of the German people'. This means that Germany 'needs a different relationship between workers and employers', based on 'shared interests'.³⁷

So while Stegerwald's plea for an interconfessional party had already been made before, he went now far beyond that: the Centre party should leave the days of the Culture Wars behind and no longer put religion at the first place. Instead, social policies and the strengthening of democracy were more important, because 'we must aim for the stabilization of our party system. Such a consolidation of our party system is only possible by means of a moderate party . . . which has a deep and broad basis among voters', he stated. This new party should be 'a strong Christian-national party of the centre'.³⁸ Indeed, Stegerwald argued that 'the special goal of the Centre Party should be . . . to bring voters together'.³⁹ In other words, just like Sollmann, he believed that only broad-based people's parties could stabilize democracy. If the Centre Party failed to transform itself in this direction 'there will be no re-emergence of Germany, but, on the contrary, new fuel will pile

³⁵ P.-L. Weinacht, 'Adam Stegerwald. Patriot, Gewerkschaftsführer, Parteigründer—im Spiegel unserer Zeit', in H. Neugebauer, ed., *Adam Stegerwald—Leben—Werk—Erbe* (Würzburg: Edition Bentheim, 1995), 11–27; B. Forster, *Adam Stegerwald—Politik in sozialer Verantwortung. Leben und Vermächtnis des Gewerkschafters und Politikers aus Unterfranken* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2008).

³⁶ A. Stegerwald, *Arbeiterwähler und Zentrumsparlei. Vortrag gehalten von Generalsekretär A. Stegerwald auf einer Versammlung von Kölner Arbeiter-Zentrumswählern* (Krefeld: Ausschuß der Arbeiterzentrewähler Westdeutschlands, 1918), 24–7.

³⁷ A. Stegerwald, *Zentrumsparlei, Arbeiterschaft, Volk und Staat* (Dortmund: Wilmersdorf Verlag, 1926), 4, 8, 20.

³⁸ A. Stegerwald, *Deutsche Lebensfragen. Vortrag auf dem X. Kongress der christlichen Gewerkschaften Deutschlands am 21. November 1920* (Berlin Verlag für Politik und Wirtschaft, 1921), 44.

³⁹ Stegerwald, *Arbeiterwähler und Zentrumsparlei*, 25.

up, new tensions will arise, and these will finish with a huge explosion', Stegerwald predicted gloomily.⁴⁰

Post-war Europe was a place of many political experiments. But while the radical new plans for a new order of the Communists and Fascists generated most attention, the attempts of people like Stegerwald and Sollmann to put forward the people's party as a solution to the ills of democracy were actually equally revolutionary. They contested the ethnic understanding of the people's party, such as put forward by the nationalists of the German National People's Party. And against the traditional proponents of the mass integration party, they provide a far-sighted vision on how the role of parties in a democratic party-state could, and should, be radically different than before 1914. Not only mobilizing and rallying their followers and contesting those in power but opening to new groups and broadening their support base to ease social tensions and compromise with adversaries were now essential to stabilize and legitimize democracy.

But outside Sweden and Denmark (and, to a lesser extent, Belgium and the Netherlands) the pleas to turn mass integration parties into people's parties and broaden their base were mostly in vain. Those who understood the function of their parties in more traditional terms still held the best cards while those understandings were also dominant among the rank-and-file. For a moment, the economic prospects were slightly brighter, but in the eyes of many Socialists, the recovery seemed to benefit most of all established economic elites. Real change in the form of workers control of factory management, redistribution of income (or land), or large-scale nationalizations failed to occur. Maybe, they reasoned, moderation had brought them too little tangible results. This was at least the view of many Austrian Socialists, who veered strongly to the Left after they ended up in opposition in 1920. And it was also the conviction of many German Socialists, who asked veteran Karl Kautsky, author of the staunchly anti-capitalist parts of the Erfurt programme of 1891, to draw up a blueprint for a new party programme that should celebrate the reunification between SPD and the Independent Socialist Party. With it, the SPD turned away from its earlier opening to the middle classes and replaced any such references with classic Marxist notions about the class struggle and sketched doom scenarios for capitalism. The party's base was far from ready to embrace plans such as those of Sollmann.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Stegerwald, *Deutsche Lebensfragen*, 38–9.

⁴¹ P. Lösche and F. Walter, *Die SPD. Klassenpartei—Volkspartei—Quotenpartei. Zur Entwicklung der Sozialdemokratie von Weimar bis zur deutschen Vereinigung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993), 15–30; H. A. Winkler, 'Klassenbewegung oder Volkspartei? Zur Programmdiskussion in der Weimarer Sozialdemokratie 1920–1925', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 8.1 (1981), 9–54.

At the same time, Catholic parties, fearful of the Socialist advance at the ballot box, also became increasingly assertive in their defence of confessional identities. With the rise of fascism and the growing violent clashes between Socialists and Fascists in Italy, Sturzo's views of a broad non-confessional party were increasingly challenged by the more conservative Catholic wing in his party (as well as by the Vatican). But also elsewhere the Pope did not hesitate to put pressure on Catholic party leaders by rallying his supporters to the rescue of Church interests. He struck a series of concordats with Western European governments that aimed to secure Vatican influence, and boosted a Catholic social movement, the Catholic Action, that often competed with Catholic parties for members, which meant that the Catholic identity of these parties became stronger. Illustrative of this trend was that the Centre Party let a government fall over a classic Culture Wars issue: the school question.⁴² And while the Christian Socials elected Ignaz Seipel, a conservative priest, as its leader, the Centre Party gained an increasingly conservative and confessional image when, in a run-off election in 1928, it chose the priest Ludwig Kaas over the other candidate, Stegerwald, as its new party leader.⁴³

In short, despite the airing of far-reaching ideas to transform mass parties into people's parties with a much broader social base, the continuities with the pre-war era deeply influenced the course of politics in the 1920s. Many Socialists and Catholics were not willing to adopt blueprints of the people's party as articulated by people like Sturzo, Gay, Sollmann, and Stegerwald. After some initial openings in this direction, the Socialists and Catholics reverted to their roots as mass parties. At the same time, dissatisfaction with parliamentary government in general, and parties in particular, grew. The largest European democracies increasingly seemed to enter a vicious circle. Ideological traditions and social divisions fuelled polarization; polarization fuelled governmental instability, which, in turn, contributed to further broad dissatisfaction with party politics and parliamentary government, stimulated by sabotage from the extremist parties on the wings of the political spectrum. Fearing the consequences of searching for compromise, the Socialist and Catholic mass parties defined their own role more narrowly by representing their core supporters in order not to alienate them further, and this further dented the prospects of strengthening governmental stability and putting forward policy proposals to combat the steep economic, social, and (geo-)political challenges of the time.

⁴² K. Ruppert, *Im Dienst am Staat von Weimar. Das Zentrum als regierende Partei in der Weimarer Demokratie 1923–1930* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1992), 334.

⁴³ M. Conway, *Catholic Politics in Europe 1918–1945* (London: Routledge, 2002), 49–51.

3

Crisis and Collapse

The People's Party in the Clash of Competing Conceptions of Mass Politics

Despite passionate pleas for the value of the people's party in times of growing polarization and violence, party leaders of the Catholic and Socialist mass parties mostly continued to cherish their original identities and traditions. Especially under pressure it seemed as if they resorted to their early roots: defending the interests of their core supporters. This not only damaged the prospects of broader social coalitions that could foster a climate of social reconciliation. It also had substantial consequences for the ability of parties to compromise and govern with opposing parties. Fragile pragmatic alliances between Socialists and Catholics were replaced by antagonisms, which became bigger as the decade proceeded and government instability became endemic. The governments in Weimar Germany and Austria seldom lasted longer than a year, while the final administrations of liberal Italy had a lifetime of only several months. France hardly did better. Especially after the economic crisis in the late 1920s, the country suffered 'extreme governmental instability'.¹ One administration in Paris even fell after barely a week.

After the previous chapter discussed the ability of parties to rally people from below and the inability to do so in a way that moved beyond their traditional support base of workers and Catholics, this chapter turns first to the other aspect in which Interwar mass parties failed to transform into people's parties: seeing opponents as democratic equals rather than existential adversaries, striking difficult compromises with them, and taking on government responsibility. This inability to transform parties in the direction of compromise and collaboration was clear from the start, especially in Italy. But it became more pressing and widespread towards the end of the 1920s and during the 1930s, when a deepening economic crisis and growing geopolitical tensions pitted parties against each other and raised the (electoral) costs of compromise further still. This boosted feelings of democratic fatigue, even among people and groups who had first, however reluctantly, supported the new democratic order. The willingness to compromise waned further when democracy was put most severely to the test, as instances of

¹ K. Passmore, 'The Republic in Crisis: politics 1914–1945', in McMillan, ed., *Modern France*, 39–73: 58.

democratic collapse in Italy, Austria, and Germany testify. The people's party seemed to have lost in a clash between competing conceptions of mass politics, in which either the mass party model (possibly allied in a Popular Front to defend democracy), or the authoritarian version of it in the guise of the Nazi and Fascist parties had brighter prospects.

The reluctance of parties to commit fully to a governing role in Interwar Europe counted especially for the Socialist parties. Most of them preferred ideological purity over the compromises inherent to government. The French Socialist leader Léon Blum captured the ambivalent feelings on governing of many Socialists inside and outside France. Blum was the son of a well-off Parisian entrepreneur and first made his name as a scholar and writer before, at the age of almost 50, he emerged at the top of his party. Blum always saw himself, in his own words, as a 'referee' between the reformist and revolutionary wings of the French Socialists.² He united both in his own person, acting as editor-in-chief of the party's newspaper that directly spoke to militants, and as chair of the parliamentary group. Blum wanted at all costs to avoid another rift in party after the split with the Communists had cost the Socialists most of their funds, members, and officials.

This careful balancing act between revolution and moderation was a continuing challenge for Blum, especially when it came to the SFIO's willingness to govern. Blum argued under what conditions Socialist participation in a government coalition was justified, making a distinction between the 'conquest' of power and the 'exercise' of power. The conquest of power was for Blum 'revolutionary', a 'total take-over of power' that 'preceded the transformation of the regime of property', or, in other words, the abolition of capitalism. It could only be based on a Socialist majority in parliament. But as such a situation was extremely unlikely, he also presented an alternative: the 'exercise of power'. This was a strictly 'parliamentary action' with reforms inside capitalism rather than its abolition as their aim.³ But the SFIO would only engage in the 'exercise' of power if it was the largest party in a coalition. So while Blum claimed to explain when Socialist participation in government was justified, he actually spelled out mostly reasons not to govern. This should preserve the SFIO's claim that they, rather than the Communists, were the only true working-class party of France. Throughout the 1920s, the SFIO rebuffed various offers of cabinet participation by the Radical Party, because allying with bourgeois parties was, in the words of Blum's fellow

² Bergounioux and Grunberg, *L'ambition et le remords*, 81.

³ L. Blum and P. Faure, *Le parti socialiste et la participation ministérielle. Discours prononcés au congrès national extraordinaire du 10 janvier 1926* (Paris: Éditions de la nouvelle revue socialiste, 1926), 3–5.

leader Paul Faure, like ‘wasting your last bullet in a battle that would not even be yours and in which socialism would be discredited’.⁴

The French Socialist Party’s reluctance to govern with so-called bourgeois parties was emblematic for other major Socialist parties. They all adopted their own version of the ‘Blum doctrine’. The German Socialists showed this reluctance when they referred to Socialist participation in government after 1927 as merely a ‘tactical decision’. They were only willing to join the government if ‘its support among the public and in the Reichstag gives assurance that it will be able to achieve specified goals which are in the interest of the working class’.⁵ Similarly, the Austrian Socialist Party harboured growing misgivings about governing with the Catholics. Renner warned his party comrades that ‘this is absolutely not the moment to enter the government’, because ‘we will not allow that the blame for the total moral, political and economic collapse will be put on the shoulders of the social democrats’.⁶

The reluctance of parties to embrace taking on governmental responsibility reflected their reluctance to accept structural compromises. And because especially willingness to compromise was so vital for the viability of democracy, this was a major concern of contemporary observers. One of these observers was Friedrich von Wieser, a former Austrian Finance Minister, and the *éminence grise* of the famous Viennese school of economics. His hometown Vienna provided arguably a perfect window on the diverging fortunes of democracy in Europe. The former grandiose metropolis of the multinational Habsburg empire was reduced to the status of capital of a juvenile and increasingly flagging republic. The increasingly violent polarization between Socialists and Catholics and its shaky parliamentary institutions were perhaps emblematic for the situation in Italy before 1922, and for contemporary Germany, and, to some extent, France as well. But, Von Wieser noted, it contrasted sharply with the more muted political climate in the Low Countries or Scandinavia. Von Wieser concluded that this contrast had little to do with formal rules of the game alone. With the notable exception of Britain, almost all of Europe lived under parliamentary government with universal (male) suffrage with an electoral system of proportional representation. So, he argued, the explanation for the difference in democratic stability lay not in the rules of the game, but in the behaviour of its players: political parties. In many unstable democracies, he noticed, ‘leaders and masses are not sufficiently mature to build true “state parties”. They have not overcome the type of the interest party.’⁷

⁴ Blum and Faure, *Le parti socialiste et la participation ministérielle*, 46.

⁵ SPD, ‘Entschließung des SPD-Parteitags im Mai 1927 zur Koalitionspolitik’ (1927), in Schönhoven, *Reformismus und Radikalismus*, 211–13: 212.

⁶ Cited with Saage, *Der erste Präsident*, 232–3.

⁷ F. von Wieser, *Das Gesetz der Macht* (Vienna: Verlag von Julius Springer, 1926), 442, 509.

The concern for the absence of parties that somehow managed to overcome their pre-1914 traditions as anti-system forces was broadly shared among political observers in the 1920s. They deplored the mass party that saw itself as the spokesperson of a narrowly defined group of people with the same religion or social class and they juxtaposed it with the 'state party' that allegedly governed with the best interest of the nation at large at heart. For some, like Von Wieser, this sentiment revealed a certain nostalgia for pre-1914 politics in which the power of the state was controlled by a small elite, a 'state party', indeed. This guaranteed governmental stability. Even though in the age of mass democracy, an elitist 'state party' was obsolete, its quality of providing government stability should somehow be preserved. Even if they did not use the term people's party, this implied that the party-state required parties that governed democracy in a cohesive way by striking deals with opponents were badly needed to turn the tide.

One of the most articulate advocates of this view was still Preuß. Preuß was widely considered the father of the Weimar constitution and he served as interior minister during the German revolution. After 1919, he retired from the political frontline and worked as a legal scholar. He remained, however firmly committed to the defence of the constitution, and was active for the same *Reichsbanner* organization to which Sollmann also rallied. Preuß continued to write about politics and to air his concerns about the problems of the Weimar republic. He blamed parties for failing to live up to the requirements that mass democracy put on them. He also held the pre-1914 mass party tradition responsible for this. Preuß argued that regimes before the War might have been far from democratic, but they provided governmental stability. Mass parties were relegated to opposition and could therefore evade responsibility; they had 'influence without responsibility'.⁸ They could exist just 'for their own sake', because 'in the authoritarian regime, the opposition by matter of principle cannot govern'.⁹ He blamed the instability of the Weimar republic on the fact that parties failed to overcome this attitude. But his analysis could be applied much more widely. It counted for the Socialist and to a lesser extent Catholic parties of Germany and Austria. But it is easy to see that it also counted for countries without an authoritarian regime before 1914, such as Italy or France. Here, too, the mass parties failed to live up to the expectations which the new system put on them, and this was problematic because as 'the parliamentary system is completely focused on political parties, political parties must be completely focused on parliamentary government. They are no longer there for the sake of themselves, but only instruments to build a parliamentary government', Preuß concluded.¹⁰

⁸ Preuß, 'Nationale Demokratie', 153.

⁹ H. Preuß, 'Um die Reichsverfassung von Weimar' (1924), in H. Preuß, *Gesammelte Schriften. Vierter Band*, 367–438: 389.

¹⁰ H. Preuß, 'Unser Parlamentarismus und unsere auswärtige Lage' (1921), in H. Preuß, *Gesammelte Schriften. Vierter Band*, 189–92: 190.

The frustration of Preuß with the failure of parties to provide cohesive government and to meet the requirements of the party-state reflected comments of contemporaries elsewhere. Just before the Fascist March on Rome, Ambrosini also blamed the problems of the party-state in Italy on the failure of Socialist and Catholic parties to build a stable government despite their recent successful efforts to make parties the centrepiece of the democratic order. He remarked that 'the public and the same politicians who voted for the [electoral] reform did not understand its consequences', namely that the postwar reforms 'do not represent only a change of electoral procedure, but a profound innovation of the concept of political representation and the functioning of the parliamentary regime . . . political parties become, or tend to become, the core of political and parliamentary life'.¹¹

There were plenty of outright and outspoken critics of the new democratic order, who often had authoritarian ambitions. But dissatisfaction with democracy seeped in more widely. Also among Catholic and Socialist politicians their traditional ambiguity about the ultimate value of parliamentary democracy resurfaced now that its problems became much more prevalent, and the optimism of the immediate postwar era quickly evaporated. This ambiguity towards parliamentary institutions thereby proved to be another pre-war tradition that was hard to erase, and further complicated the forging of compromises for parties within the framework of increasingly feeble parliamentary institutions.

This counted certainly for some prominent Socialists. The French Socialists, and their general secretary Paul Faure in particular, displayed a profound dislike for the rules and institutions of parliament. At every congress, party members pointed critically to the danger of compromising with the 'system' and despised the way political elites were allegedly detached from ordinary citizens.¹² They even adopted a motion that stated that any rapprochement with the government 'will not have the slightest success. The SFIO will remain a party of the class struggle and of opposition'.¹³ The SPD, in turn, on the one hand presented itself as the guardian of the Weimar constitution and displayed its dislike of any revolutionary pretensions (Ebert hated revolution 'like sin', he once admitted and very much saw himself as the personification of the Grand Coalition that had brought the Weimar Republic to life).¹⁴ But on the other hand, the tendency of leading SPD

¹¹ G. Ambrosini, 'La trasformazione del regime parlamentare e del governo di gabinetto', *Rivista di diritto pubblico e giurisprudenza amministrativa* 4 (1922), 187–98: 189.

¹² T. Judt, *Marxism and the French Left. Studies in Labour and Politics in France 1830–1981* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 128.

¹³ Quoted by Bergounioux and Grunberg, *L'ambition et le remords*, 97.

¹⁴ Mühlhausen, *Friedrich Ebert*, 60–6. On the these ambitions of Ebert see also W. Mühlhausen, *Friedrich Ebert und seine Partei 1919–1925* (Heidelberg: Stiftung Reichspräsident Friedrich Ebert, 1992), 3–7.

politicians to distinguish between 'real' and mere 'bourgeois' democracy, as they had done before 1914, persisted. They still emphasized that 'democracy belongs historically and sociologically to the working class'.¹⁵ Along the same lines, the Austrian Socialists played a semantic game on their commitment to the same parliamentary institutions that they had designed only a few years before. Echoing the SPD, they stated that 'we aspire to take control of the republic, not with the aim of overcoming democracy, but with the aim of making democracy into the service of the working-class'. Meeting in Linz in 1926 for their annual party congress, the party adopted a new programme that declared that 'the history of the democratic republic is the history of a class struggle between the bourgeoisie and working class over the control of the republic'. Collaboration between the two was impossible, 'because of the contradictions of capitalism'. If its bourgeois enemies thwarted the construction of a socialist society after a Socialist election victory, the party would launch a 'counter revolution' as it would then be evident that 'the working class can only conquer the state by means of a civil war'.¹⁶ The Socialists soon prepared for this. While the Christian Socials reinforced ties with the paramilitary *Heimwehr* movement, the Socialist defence organization was 'militarized' into a paramilitary unit and soon numbered almost 100,000 members.¹⁷ They all had the duty to 'protect the party and other proletarian organizations'. In times of danger, they should 'march as quickly as possible' to the several arms depots that the league possessed, as the instructions for its members stated.¹⁸

Such ambiguity about the ultimate value of parliamentary institutions fed reluctance towards seeking compromises with opposing parties. As democracy, in this view, centred on the ability of parties to mobilize their supporters and strengthen their sense of social or cultural identity, compromise was seen as a sign of weakness. This conviction was prevalent among Socialists in Germany and Italy, also when their democracies were already on the brink (or over it). Benito Mussolini became prime minister in October 1922 at the head of a coalition between Liberals, Nationalists, Fascists, and two PPI-ministers who joined on a personal title. But because PPI was deeply divided and the Catholics and the PSI still held a parliamentary majority between them, especially Turati argued that the PSI should ally with the PPI to try and oust Mussolini.¹⁹ Turati talked about 'a common ground not just of defence but of constructive action of democratic

¹⁵ R. Hilferding, *Die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie in der Republik. Rede gehalten auf dem Parteitag zu Kiel* (Berlin: SPD, 1927), 10.

¹⁶ Maderthaner, *Die österreichische Sozialdemokratie*, 11–16. See also Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Deutschösterreich, *Das Linzer Programm* (1926). Found on <https://www.marxists.org/deutsch/geschichte/oesterreich/spoe/1926/linzerprog.htm>.

¹⁷ O. Naderer, *Der bewaffnete Aufstand. Der Republikanischer Schutzbund der österreichischen Sozialdemokratie und die militärische Vorbereitung auf den Bürgerkrieg (1923–1934)* (Reihe: Ares Verlag, 2004), 194.

¹⁸ Republikanischer Schutzbund, *Handbuch für Funktionäre* (Vienna, 1930), 61–2.

¹⁹ F. Livorsi, *Turati. Cinquant'anni di socialismo in Italia* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1984), 386–7.

energies' that PPI and Socialist politicians shared and that they should use to contest Mussolini.²⁰ While as the party's founder Turati's voice still carried weight, most of the PSI could not overcome its traditional rejection of governing in a bourgeois setting. They believed that greater working-class resilience was the best response to fascism. The leader of the PSI accused Turati of betraying the working class by proposing to govern with the Catholics, while 'we, rather than ceasing to be socialists, continue to be ourselves Collaboration would change us into a social democratic party. Joining the government means being caught in the bourgeois net.'²¹ Turati and his followers were expelled from the PSI.

The situation in which the SPD had to decide how to reconcile its ultimate commitment to the working-class with taking government responsibility in a time when the Nazis mobilized against democracy was arguably even more difficult. Suffering a trauma after its punishment at the polls in 1920, the SPD had promised only to return to government if it could start an ambitious social reform programme. But when the SPD emerged victorious at the 1928 elections the window for such a programme had already closed. The Communists and Nazis made inroads at the elections resulting in a deeply divided parliament. The SPD's only option was a so-called Grand Coalition with moderate liberals and the Centre Party. Amid the economic slump of the late 1920s, the SPD's coalition partners then proposed cuts in the duration and coverage of a landmark unemployment insurance which had only recently been adopted. This had repercussions inside the SPD too, precisely because with soaring unemployment, social security was for them more badly needed than ever. This pitted Socialists who emphasized government responsibility against those who called upon the party to remain faithful to its working-class roots and ideals.²² Ever more Socialists argued that only by returning to their roots could the SPD turn the tide, regain popular support, and stem the rise of Nazism. The editor of the SPD-magazine *Vorwärts* wrote that if the SPD faced the choice between taking government responsibility or staying true its working-class constituency 'our decision would be in no doubt. The party would have to act on the principle that "party and government are two, but party and trade union movement are one and indivisible"²³ Such views became stronger once the SPD felt constrained to support, or 'tolerate' a government led by Centre Party-politician Heinrich Brüning as the only alternative was a government that included the Nazis. One influential voice asserted that the only way to 'overcoming the Nazis and the fascist danger [is] by a radical alteration of the

²⁰ F. Turati, 'Per la collaborazione tra socialisti e cattolici' (1924), in F. Turati, ed., *Socialismo e riformismo nella storia d'Italia. Scritti politici 1878-1932* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1979), 489-93: 491.

²¹ Cited by G. de Rosa, *Storia del movimento cattolico in Italia. Il partito Popolare Italiano* (Bari: Laterza, 1966), 233.

²² Schönhoven, *Reformismus und Radikalismus*, 141-51.

²³ Cited with W. L. Guttsman, *The German Social Democratic Party 1875-1933. From Ghetto to Government* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981), 320.

previous course of the Party. This would mean a policy which pays no heed to coalitions, but campaigns directly for the proletarian demands, as the only means to overcome the crisis and unite the masses around the banner of Social Democracy.²⁴

The same dynamic of moving away from the centre was visible among Catholic politicians. Although he had previously rejected the idea, Sturzo considered that some form of collaboration between PPI and PSI might be needed to avoid a Fascist grasp of power. He met regularly with Turati over the course of the summer of 1922 to explore such opportunities. Sturzo found some support for his views inside the PPI, for instance with his eventual successor Alcide de Gasperi, who argued that 'no one could deny that the entrance of a party as numerous and strong as the Socialists in constitutional life would be of great historical importance...and would make the work of reconstruction easier'.²⁵ However, the majority of the party moved in the other direction, towards opening up to the possibility of some form of understanding with Mussolini's movement. Moreover, the Vatican also moved quickly against any such initiatives, prohibiting the local clergy from being active as militants for the party.²⁶ By the autumn of 1922, the right wing of the PPI supported the idea of ending the perpetual government instability by supporting a coalition government led by Mussolini. Sturzo appealed to his party fellows to 'untie' themselves from Mussolini, as he called it, before it was too late. He denounced the Fascist regime with its 'absolute conception of the deification of the nation and the state'.²⁷ But this was to no avail. Mussolini's government moved forward with the introduction of an electoral law that should enable him to perpetuate his rule. In the crucial vote, most PPI MPs abstained while others voted in favour. Sturzo was forced to resign as party leader.

The shifting stance of the PPI showed that the growing suspicion to parliamentary democracy and deeply seated anti-Marxism also lived among those who had actively contributed to the installation of democratic institutions. The Austrian Chancellor Ignaz Seipel was a scholar and priest who turned to politics in the final days of the First World War and played an important role in the transition from empire to republic as minister in Renner's first government. After the break between Christian Socials and Socialists in 1920, he dominated Austrian politics of the decade, as the undisputed leader of the Christian Social Party and long-time Chancellor. But his affection for democracy did not grow on him during his time in office. When the Austrian republic celebrated its tenth birthday, Seipel found that there was little reason for celebration. He argued that people cherished too high expectations of democracy in 1918 as they projected 'whatever possible

²⁴ 'No to "Toleration"', in D. Beetham, ed., *Marxists in the Face of Fascism. Writings by Marxists on Fascism from the Inter-war Period* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 264–7: 265.

²⁵ De Rosa, *Storia del movimento cattolico*, 251.

²⁶ P. Ottone, *De Gasperi* (Milan: Della Volpe, 1968), 85.

²⁷ Sturzo, 'La funzione storica', 403.

hopes on the word democracy in our state'. It was now clear that all that remained was 'disenchantment'. As with other political Catholics, criticism on political parties occupied a prominent place in his explanations for this sudden change of sentiment. He even argued that popular dissatisfaction with democracy would be greater 'the stronger the position of parties in a democracy is'.²⁸ Party leaders and functionaries were not directly responsible to the people and cared for their own interests. This counted in particular 'when the party is not actually a party, but an economic organization or representation of a class'.²⁹

Thus, the Christian Social Party went increasingly in authoritarian directions, fuelled by the polarization with the Socialists. Seipel's successor and former party fellow Engelbert Dollfuss made use of the political deadlock to suspend parliament and prepare a new constitution which should turn Austria into an authoritarian Catholic state where elected representatives were replaced by cultural, religious, and economic representatives. Dollfuss's assault on the constitution was the backdrop of the start of the short Austrian Civil War between Socialists and Catholics.³⁰ After securing victory, Dollfuss's government banned his competitors, executed leading Socialists, and imprisoned others, including Kreisky and Renner.³¹ He then continued with his controversial plans for a new constitution, which was adopted symbolically on the 1st of May 1934. He thereby not only challenged the Socialist monopoly on the meaning of Labour Day, but also made the ratification coincide with a new concordat between Vienna and the Pope to give a Catholic halo to his regime.

In this way, anti-Marxism, lingering misgivings regarding parliamentarianism, and anti-party sentiments formed a toxic cocktail on which many political Catholics now projected authoritarian solutions.³² This was also visible with many Centre Party politicians, among whom feelings of dissatisfaction with the Weimar republic and everything it stood for grew quickly after the failure of the Grand Coalition with the SPD. One prominent Centre Party politician remarked that year that 'everyone feels the weakness and impotence of our system of government. I have had the opinion for a long time that the parliament is not able to solve our domestic problems. If it were possible to have a dictatorship for ten years, I would wish for it'.³³ After 1930, the Centre Party practically governed alone, first with Brüning, who aimed for revision of the constitution in an

²⁸ I. Seipel, 'Die Münchner Kritik der Demokratie', in I. Seipel, *Der Kampf um die österreichische Verfassung* (Vienna and Leipzig: Wilhelm Braumüller Verlag, 1930), 167–77: 169.

²⁹ I. Seipel 'Die Tübinger Kritik der Demokratie', I. Seipel, *Der Kampf*, 177–88: 186.

³⁰ K. Bauer, *Die Februar-Aufstand 1934. Fakten und Mythen* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2019).

³¹ W. Goldinger and D. A. Binder, *Geschichte der Republik Österreich 1918–1938* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1992), 200ff.

³² M. Conway, 'Catholic Politics or Christian Democracy? The Evolution of Inter-war Political Catholicism', in Kaiser and Wohnout, eds, *Political Catholicism*, 235–51.

³³ Eugen Bolz, quoted by R. Morsey, 'Die deutsche Zentrumpartei', in E. Matthias and R. Morsey, eds, *Das Ende der Parteien 1933. Darstellungen und Dokumente* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1979), 286–417: 292.

authoritarian direction and a sharp reduction of state spending.³⁴ He increasingly sought solutions for the problems of government outside parliament, most of all in the presidential emergency powers that the constitution provided for. Many conservative politicians, inside and outside the Centre Party, believed they could end the factious politics and harness Hitler by bringing him into government. This would also provide a bulwark against the perceived assertiveness of the Socialists and Communists, whom they feared might soon join forces now that the SPD veered further to the left. Centre Party leader Kaas stated that 'there are 12 million Germans in the Right-wing opposition and 13.5 in the Left. The Left could unify at any moment, and it is going to be a long, cold winter. The NSDAP must be brought into government now.'³⁵ This then happened in January 1933, and just as the PPI before, the Centre Party was with a mix of bullying and false promises lured to support Hitler's assault on the constitution.

Of course, the reluctance of Socialists and Catholics to work together to defend democratic institutions was not the only cause of the democratic breakdown in Italy, Austria, or Germany. Many other factors, both more short-term and long-term, both domestic and international, were at play. And there were many other actors who bore responsibility, in the first place, of course, the Fascists and Nazis whose attack on democratic institutions inside parliament and on the streets was ruthless. But the inability of the Socialists and Catholics to forge structural compromises played a large role too. Instead of moving to the centre, mass parties went further to the margins, feeding the growing polarization and governmental instability which preceded the Fascist March on Rome, Dollfuss's assault on the republican constitution, or Hitler's take-over of power. As such, this tendency of the Catholic and Socialist mass parties towards mutual distrust, reluctance to embrace government responsibility, and aversion to compromise revealed longer traditions suspicious of parliamentary democracy and a narrow conception of the role of parties in the political process which prioritized ideological purity over compromise.

The take-over by Mussolini in Italy was initially regarded as an exception that could be ignored (of course not for far-right groups willing to emulate his March on Rome elsewhere).³⁶ But by the time democracy collapsed in Germany and Austria, there was growing alarm among politicians in other Western European countries that the destruction of democracy there might be replicated elsewhere.

³⁴ L. E. Jones, *The German Right. Political Parties, Organized Interest and Political Associations in the Struggle against Weimar Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 532.

³⁵ Ludwig Kaas, quoted by R. Henig, *The Weimar Republic 1919–1933* (London: Routledge, 1998), 74.

³⁶ W. Schieder, 'Das italienische Experiment. Der Faschismus als Vorbild in der Krise der Weimarer Republik', *Historische Zeitschrift* 262.1 (1996), 73–125.

Mass politics seemed to take the shape of a virulent and increasingly violent clash between mass parties in their either class-based or authoritarian-nationalist fashion, with the latter now having the upper hand. In any case, in this clash, the model of the people's party seemed to be losing out, squeezed by more radical alternatives.

In the face of the rise of fascism and Nazism Catholic and Socialist Party leaders outside Germany, Italy, and Austria reconsidered their strategies. Political Catholics in Belgium and the Netherlands had initially veered to the right as a response to the economic crisis of the late 1920s and early 1930s. But ultimately, and in contrast to the Centre Party, they confirmed their commitment to parliamentary institutions. In Belgium, after some of those were initially tempted by far-right groups such as the Rexists, they declared that the Catholic party there had 'never been a confessional party. Its mission is not of a religious, but a political character'.³⁷ The Roman Catholic State Party in the Netherlands increasingly stressed that it was concerned with public welfare and well-being and the general interest, rather than only with Catholic rights and slowly opened up to collaboration with the Socialist Party.

The left also debated intensely how to confront and stop the rise of authoritarian regimes across Europe. Their new strategy pointed not in the direction of broader-based people's parties but confirmed the model of the mass party deeply rooted in the working classes. However, in contrast to before, they did realize that democracy required collaboration between different classes—and therefore between opposing parties—to be sustained and defended in the form of what was called a Popular Front. It was particularly prominent in France and Spain, fuelled there by the fear of the quick take-over of power by Hitler but also stimulated by polarization in Paris and Madrid itself. In Spain, left- and right-wing coalitions alternated quickly after the adoption of a democratic constitution in 1931. But while the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE)'s agenda of far-reaching social reforms and anti-clerical measures raised high expectations among workers and peasants, it alienated more moderate republican forces such as those belonging to the Radical Party.³⁸ The right-wing coalition turned back the clock on reforms after winning elections in 1934, showing how little consensus there existed among the country's political elites in an atmosphere of growing strikes and violence. In France, the extra-parliamentary far-right grew increasingly bold, most visible in the rise of colonel François de la Rocque and his Croix-de-Feu movement of war veterans. The fears for such movements reached new heights in February 1934, when nationalist groups launched a violent assault on parliament leading to lethal clashes with the police.

³⁷ Quoted by E. Gerard, 'Religion, Class and Language: The Catholic Party in Belgium', in W. Kaiser and H. Wahnout, eds, *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918–1945* (London, 2004), 94–115: 109.

³⁸ N. Townson, *The Crisis of Democracy in Spain: Centrist Politics under the Second Republic* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2000).

The events in both countries of 1934 were then the trigger for the left to rethink its strategy. The construction of Popular Fronts not only with Socialists, but also with previously despised 'bourgeois' parties became the official line of the Communist International, resulting in Popular Front coalitions in Spain and France of Socialist, Communist, and Radical parties. The idea that the Popular Front could be the answer to the crisis of democracy witnessed a moment of hope with their election victories in Spain and France and the formation of Popular Front governments. France had its first Socialist prime minister, as Blum forged a coalition with the Radicals that could count on support of the PCF in parliament. His government is most of all remembered for an impressive set of social reforms which introduced the forty-hour work week, paid holidays, and a system of wage negotiations that gave trade unions recognition and more power (also to curb a massive strike wave that gripped the country after the Front's election victory). And Blum's administration moved quickly too to defend France's democratic institutions, for instance by outlawing the paramilitary movements such as the Croix-de-Feu.

However, this optimism did not last. Spain quickly saw a military coup which triggered the Spanish Civil War and in which the Popular Front faced Franco's army. Blum's government failed to provide military support to the Popular Front in Spain, which turned into a theatre of the European-wide conflict between democracy and dictatorship. After some initial successes, the Popular Front was on the losing side in the Civil War from 1937 onwards and increasingly deeply divided internally. These divisions were also visible in the French government. Radicals felt increasingly uncomfortable in the government that prided itself on its progressive credentials and with two staunchly working-class parties. They soon urged Blum to make a 'pause' with his programme of social reforms.³⁹ But the Socialists had to moderate their views too.⁴⁰ Even in a government that had his own Socialist signature, Blum continued to downplay expectations towards militants.⁴¹ He told party members that 'we exercise power, we have not conquered it', reminding them of the distinction he made earlier. And he was careful to distinguish the party from the government, telling them that:

the Party must not imagine for a single minute that its life will henceforth be concentrated and absorbed in government action. No! The party accepts a mandate, charges comrades to execute it, but continues with its own life and mission, and none of this should be weakened, on the contrary!⁴²

³⁹ J. Colton, *Léon Blum. Humanist in Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1966), 185.

⁴⁰ G.-R. Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism. Ideology, Activism and Contingency in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 116.

⁴¹ J. Jackson, *The Popular Front in France. Defending Democracy 1934-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 60.

⁴² L. Blum, 'Le gouvernement Léon Blum de 1936', (1936), in L. Blum, *L'œuvre de Léon Blum 1934-1937* (Paris: A. Michel, 1964), 255-89: 256, 268.

Blum's efforts to keep his government together were in vain. After 1938, France was stuck again with the same kind of Radical-led governments of the past with their ever-shifting majorities.

The legacy of the Popular Front as an alternative to the people's party in an attempt to defend democracy was therefore mixed, especially in France, where it was not defeated on the battlefield but in parliament. As democracy was torn apart by polarization, the Popular Front underlined how important alliances across party lines were in its defence. But the Popular Front struggled to produce an alternative vision of how democracy might be transformed to avoid polarization in the first place. Its backbone was still the compromise between the Communist and Socialist mass parties which did not move beyond their traditional conception of class- (and mass-) based politics, even if, for the moment, they forged a pragmatic alliance. The idea of a Popular Front had a brief revival in Italy after the Second World War, but elsewhere it was dead by the end of the 1930s, defeated in Spain, disempowered in France, and ditched everywhere else by the Communists after Stalin signed a non-aggression pact with Hitler in 1939.

The quick rise and fall of Popular Fronts showed how difficult it was to defend democracy in the 1930s. But its sudden rise in popularity also illustrates how the conception of the people's party lost out against other and seemingly more attractive models of mass politics that were explicitly based on the notion of the mass party rooted in a single subculture and social group—even if these aligned temporarily for a greater good. However, the model of the people's party seemed to lose out too against another competing conception of mass politics which also explicitly invoked 'the people'. Almost all countries saw the emergence of movements, parties, and leagues that claimed to overcome the ills of party democracy by promising to abolish it all together. The various movements of the radical right in Europe displayed an enormous heterogeneity, which later fuelled debates about what extent they were, or were not, part of the same Fascist family. However they were called, they played an important, and in some countries crucial, role in weakening democracy, as they openly displayed their dissatisfaction of party democracy and prided themselves pugnaciously on their anti-party identity. But the paradox was of course that some of these movements turned into genuine parties themselves, like the Rexist movement in Belgium or the Croix-de-Feu in France, which became the French Social Party after Blum outlawed it.⁴³

Whereas the anti-party rhetoric was part of their playbook, it was apparently only a small step from the refutation of parties to the conviction that only their own party should be allowed to exist, because only they allegedly represented the

⁴³ S. Bernstein and J.-P. Thomas, *Le PSF. Un parti de masse à droite* (Paris: CNRS, 2016).

nation as a whole.⁴⁴ Indeed, what all these movements had in common was that they claimed to represent the people in its entirety against parties that deliberately only represented a section of them. Or, in the words of one of the French leagues, they stood 'above the interest of a single group' and instead intended to 'gather all those who put the salvation of France above everything else'.⁴⁵ In other words, from their perspective, the problems of party democracy could only be overcome by a party which superseded all other parties and represented the nation as a whole. Therefore Neumann called them mass integration parties of an 'absolutist' kind.⁴⁶

The most powerful of these movements were, of course, the Fascist and Nazi parties. Their leaders and intellectual cheerleaders maintained that the NSDAP and PNF represented no sections of the people, but the people as a whole. They claimed that their parties were actually people's parties. The Italian Fascist Dino Grandi captured this spirit by claiming that 'fascism is not a party and does not want to be a party. It stands above all parties and captures all of them in a fantastic synthesis'.⁴⁷ The PNF congress concluded that 'the Fascist Party is not a fraction of the Italian people, but the nation itself that is politically active'.⁴⁸ The Fascist Party drew support from different social groups in the elections of the early 1920s. Later, when it had established its dictatorship, its rule depended on more than coercive force alone. In its so-called 'years of consensus' the regime's rule was at least partly based on the ability of the Fascist Party to appeal to workers, civil servants, middle-class urban dwellers, and industrialists alike.⁴⁹ Also the NSDAP attracted voters from diverse backgrounds and was as such the first party able to break through the sharp divisions that marked German politics since the end of the nineteenth century. It was a 'catch-all party of protest' with a broad social base that to some extent mirrored the German electorate. It caught votes of workers as well as businessmen, protestants as well as, although somewhat less, Catholics, city dwellers as well as people from the countryside.⁵⁰ The Nazi and Fascist parties were able to break electorally through some of the strict social boundaries that characterized Interwar politics. For these reasons, also some historians have also labelled these parties, and especially the NSDAP, 'people's parties'.⁵¹

⁴⁴ M. L. Sergio, *Dall'antipartito al partito unico. La crisi della politica in Italia agli inizi del 900* (Rome: Studium, 2002).

⁴⁵ Quoted by Berman, *Democracy and Dictatorship*, 177.

⁴⁶ Neumann, *Die Parteien*, 107.

⁴⁷ Quoted by Sergio, *Dall'antipartito al partito unico*, 227.

⁴⁸ Sergio, *Dall'antipartito al partito unico*, 230.

⁴⁹ For fascism the thesis of 'consensus' originally comes from Mussolini's biographer Renzo de Felice: R. de Felice, *Mussolini il duce. Gli anni del consenso 1929-1936* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974). It was controversial at the time, but the notion that the fascist regime was based on more than oppression alone is now more broadly accepted. For a more critical view see P. Corner, *The Fascist Party and Popular Opinion in Mussolini's Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵⁰ J. Falter, 'The First German Volkspartei', in K. Rohe, ed., *Elections, Parties and Political Traditions. Social Foundations of German Parties and Party Systems* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1990), 53-81.

⁵¹ On the NSDAP as 'people's party' see J. Noakes, 'Leaders of the People? The Nazi Party and German Society', *Journal of Contemporary History* 39.2 (2004), 189-212; S. G. Frits, 'The NSDAP as

Although they had a more varied support base than parties that started from a strict working-class or religious basis, the Nazi and Fascist parties contrasted with the people's parties that emerged in postwar Europe—or those that were propagated by people like Sollmann, Sturzo, and Branting before. First, and most obviously, their claims of so-called 'voluntary consensus' and the 'general interest' were of course part of their propaganda. In their search for power, they suppressed, harassed, and beat down opponents, intimidated voters at polling booths, set fire on opposing party newspaper offices and not seldom plotted (and executed) political murders of opponents.⁵² When they took power, they instigated the suppression of political opponents forcing them into exile or locking them up in prisons, and concentration camps. The PNF or NSDAP gave a whole new definition to the notion of the party-state. From a party-state, or, to follow the original German term *Parteienstaat*, in plural, the new regimes became one-party regimes, where, at least in intention, the difference between state and party all but disappeared.⁵³

Second, many protagonists of the idea of the people's party, both before and after 1945, intended that it should not be defined in exclusionary terms, certainly not nationalist or ethnic ones. It should in theory open to everyone, citizens from all walks of life and whatever class, creed, or profession. But the dictatorial parties were by nature exclusive. This was most obviously in the case of the NSDAP, with its exclusionary and ethnic notion of the German nation, excluding Jews and others considered by the regime as 'non-Germans' or even 'sub-human'. Similar trends were visible in Italy, also before the adoption of its racial laws there in 1938.⁵⁴ The PNF might claim to represent the entire nation, it was exclusionary to all of those that the regime pushed to the margins of society. The politics of racial extermination that their regimes practised were foreshadowed by the exclusionary basis on which these parties were established. Other than post-1945 people's parties, which stood open to all 'working people', meaning in principle anyone, or praise Christianity as a 'universal' value that welcomed anyone, these parties were not open to the people as a whole, but had an exclusive, and exclusionary, notion of it, based on an ethnic and radical form of nationalism.

Volkspartei? Social Basis of the Nazi Voter', *History Teacher* 20.3 (1987), 379–99; and J. W. Falter and M. H. Kater, 'Wähler und Mitglieder der NSDAP: neue Forschungsergebnisse zur Soziographie des Nationalsozialismus', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 19 (1993), 155–77.

⁵² M. R. Ebner, *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini's Italy* (Cambridge, 2011).

⁵³ On the legal theory (and intellectual cross-over) of the Fascist and Nazi party state see M. La Torre, 'The German Impact on Fascist Public Law Doctrine—Costantino Mortati's "Material Constitution"', in C. Joerges and N. S. Ghaleigh, eds, *Darker Legacies of Law in Europe. The Shadow of National Socialism and Fascism over Europe and Its Legal Traditions* (Oxford and Portland: Bloomsbury, 2003), 307–20; and S. Benöhr, *Das faschistische Verfassungsrecht Italiens aus der Sicht von Gerhard Leibholz. Zu den Ursprüngen der Parteienstaatslehre* (Baden Baden: Nomos Verlag, 1999).

⁵⁴ G. Turi, *Lo stato educatore. Politica e intellettuali nell'Italia fascista* (Bari: Laterza, 2004); E. Collotti, *Il Fascismo e gli ebrei. Le leggi razziali in Italia* (Bari: Laterza, 2006).

By the end of the 1930s, the future of democracy in Western Europe looked dim. For the moment, authoritarian forms of government and the party model on which these were based, in all their varieties, seemed to have much brighter prospects. After the principal Catholic and Socialist mass parties had failed to broaden the social basis of their support in the 1920s, they had also struggled to forge lasting compromises with opponents and provide much-needed government stability in the following decade. This was also, or perhaps especially, the case when democracy seemed existentially threatened, which pushed party elites towards the margins rather than the centre of the political field. The potentially disastrous consequences of the absence of compromise and a more general feeling of lacking a sense of responsibility that stretched beyond narrow party interests were often highlighted by contemporary observers. But it was most deeply felt by some of Interwar Europe's most prominent politicians. Blum was deeply aware of this problem. In a treatise called *The reform of government*, published when he came to power in 1936, he explained that:

there is no political stability without a minimum level of party organization . . . there are parties in France, and even too many of them, but most of them lack coherence and consistency. They form, dissolve and reform according to the changes of parliament, they are subject to fragmentation, they are wrecked by personal rivalries, they lack discipline, and, above all they miss consistency in their positions and programmes.⁵⁵

But this was perhaps not the worst problem, because political stability depended also on what he called 'a minimum of morality in the action of parties'. France lacked a 'constitutional opposition', one that was constructive, had a sense of responsibility and could compromise and:

that has the right to challenge the government in power but does not have the right to fight with bias, on every turn, on every occasion, all the measures that it proposes. It does not have the right to refuse the government the measures that it would itself propose if it were in power instead.⁵⁶

This was an important observation for many reasons. Written at the beginning of Blum's time in office, it was already an accurate prediction of the fate of his own Popular Front government, where party-political considerations of the Communists, Socialists, and Radical parties eventually prevailed. But it was also an observation that counted for the political situation in general in many European countries in the 1930s. Here, especially as the future of democracy

⁵⁵ L. Blum, *La réforme gouvernementale* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1936), 213–14.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 217.

looked ever dimmer and party democracy (and the parties that supported it) was more severely and more principally contested, parties became ever more closed in themselves and concerned with their own interests and approval ratings. Rather than moving to the centre they moved to the margins, and rather than compromising with opponents they increasingly saw those opponents not as democratic rivals, but existential threats. This delegitimized democratic institutions and provided scope for anti-democratic rivals to exploit their vulnerabilities.

4

Democracy's Interwar Crisis as Learning Experience

The establishment of authoritarian regimes from Vienna to Madrid signalled that the experiment of the party-state that was launched with such high expectations in the aftermath of the First World War had, in many places, come to an end. The failures of party democracy came in various guises and magnitudes: ranging from the spiritual crisis of the French Third Republic (culminating when the majority of parliament voted to give full powers to Marshall Pétain under the pressure of the Nazi invasion), the polarization and violent destabilization of Austria, the defeat of the Popular Front in the Spanish Civil War, and the parliamentary paralysis in Germany and Italy before the take-over of Hitler and Mussolini. Parallel to these momentous cases of democratic collapse, other countries experienced their own, more minor, democratic crises, where governmental instability, the rise of extremist movements on the left and right, and a general fatigue among the population with what was seen as the slowness of parliament discredited democratic institutions even if they did not fatally weaken them.¹

In whatever form and gravity, the crises of democracy in Interwar Europe had many national-specific causes. But what they all had in common was that governmental instability and parliamentary gridlock seemed to prove that the political parties on which the stability—and survival—of the party-state depended were often unable to provide the kind of broad-based support and compromises that the logic of the party-state required. The same parties that were heralded as harbingers of democracy in 1918 were now widely held responsible for its failures, visible in the electoral rise of anti-democratic movements that both capitalized on and fed dissatisfaction with party democracy. The model of the people's party, first prudently and then more passionately articulated by people such as Sollmann and Branting, seemed to have lost out against the more divisive model of the mass integration party. But it also seemed to lose out against the authoritarian and nationalist party, based on the idea of the superiority of the nation above anything else. This type could build on a strong anti-party (and, often, anti-democratic) political culture that matured already before 1914 and was now fed by the

¹ S. Grüner, 'Probleme des Weimarer Parteiensystems in Vergleich', in A. Wirsching, ed., *Herausforderungen der parlamentarischen Demokratie. Die Weimarer Republik im europäischen Vergleich* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2007), 111–25.

polarization and instability which seemed to prove their predictions. It radicalized in the 1920s as many militants concluded that the problems of party democracy could be solved best by abolishing it altogether and by replacing it with a regime that superseded party divisions in the name of one single party.

However, both the failures of the mass party and life under authoritarian one-party regimes contributed to an unexpected revival of the idea of the people's party. If the experience with party democracy in the 1920s and 1930s, and with the dictatorial regimes that followed it, was rather traumatic, it was also a learning experience on how to transform political parties in the future. The tribulations of Interwar politics were a lasting warning about what could be the fatal consequence when parties were parties 'for their own sake', as Preuß had predicted already in 1920.² So if lessons could indeed be drawn from the failures these taught that politicians should push parties further in the direction of people's parties. The latter half of the 1930s and the early 1940s were therefore a transformative period for thinking about party politics and the role and responsibilities of parties in mass democracy.

The postwar success of the people's party was the fruit of a long process in which politicians built on initiatives such as those of Sturzo to establish the PPI, the efforts of Gay to broaden the base of the PDP and, Branting's early initiatives to make the Swedish Socialists the party of the 'homeland' of the Swedish people. When instability and polarization were accompanied by open and real threats to democratic regimes in the 1930s, the urgency to develop further the people's party as a political model grew. In particular the threat posed to Weimar democracy was a catalyst in this regard, inside and outside Germany. Inside Germany, coming from different ideological directions, as we have seen, Sollmann and Stegerwald both argued that mobilizing the existing supporters of parties was not sufficient to entrench and defend democracy. They tried to turn their parties, which had traditionally been outsiders, into insiders that more explicitly represented the German nation as a whole rather than only workers or Catholics. The Centre Party should become a 'Christian-national people's party' as Stegerwald called it.³ Sollman argued that the SPD should depart from the 'famous communist manifesto of Marx and Engels that closed with "proletarians of all countries unite" and expressed that workers did not have a fatherland'. Rather, it should ensure that 'the German workers movement should connect the German worker with the German fatherland'.⁴ Sollmann and Stegerwald argued that only people's parties with a broad base could stabilize democracy. So, while coming from different national and ideological backgrounds, they put forward the notion of a 'people's

² Preuß, 'Nationale Demokratie', 153.

³ Stegerwald, *Deutsche Lebensfragen*, 59.

⁴ W. Sollmann, 'Nation und Sozialismus', *Das Reichsbanner* 4, 19.2. 1927), 1.

party' not only to overcome the ills of their own party and country, but as an answer to the economic and political challenges of their time at large.

Yet, in the end, even Stegerwald and Sollmann met their limits. They were resisted inside their own parties. The Centre Party moved ever more in conservative direction in (and had chosen Kaas over Stegerwald as its leader). Sollmann was increasingly side-lined as the SPD turned to the Left. They also, of course, met with the limits of the Nazi regime. Although he was part of the team of the Centre Party that negotiated with Hitler in the lead-up to the Enabling Act, Stegerwald was persecuted shortly after and put on a death list. He went into hiding several times to escape persecution. Sollmann was among the thousands of Socialists interned and tortured by the Nazis after they took power. After his release he escaped to Britain. But Stegerwald and Sollmann also met limits in their own thinking, which underlines the tragic antagonism that characterized Interwar democracy even for those most committed to its defence. In the run-up to the formation of Germany's final Grand Coalition in 1928 between Centre Party and the SPD, in retrospect the country's final chance at a democratic government, Sollmann and Stegerwald's conceptions of the people's party clashed directly in parliament.⁵ And here they made clear that even these proponents of compromise and moderation were ultimately suspicious of one another. Pointing again to the importance of the pre-1914 legacies of Catholics and Socialists, Stegerwald claimed that precisely the SPD and the Centre Party, the 'parties that were repressed in the old state', or the German empire, 'must take leadership in the new state', but that this was impossible because the SPD clung on to its class-based politics. Pressed, he even admitted that he 'never believed in the possibility' that the social democratic masses could be integrated in the state led by the SPD. The only way workers and other groups could be brought together was in what he called the shared Christian-national cultural community. Sollmann retorted that Stegerwald 'also counts capitalists as part of the Christian-national cultural community', even though 'the engine of capitalism is the ruthless enrichment of elites and the exploitation of the weak'. And he concluded by saying that 'people's community and shared culture are nice words...but [they] are impossible in a society so deeply divided' by social inequalities.⁶ Solidarity, in other words, could only exist on a class basis.

So even for people so dedicated to compromise as were Sollmann and Stegerwald the obstacles towards broader people's parties lay in a reluctance to trust opponents and find common ground with them. They did not stand alone. Socialist and Catholic parties across Europe did not start from a shared belief in parliamentary democracy, but from their class-based or Catholic worldview. The

⁵ Ebert, *Wilhelm Sollmann*, 345–346.

⁶ Stegerwald and Sollmann in *Verhandlungen des Reichstages*, 413 Sitzung, Donnerstag, 29.3.1928, 13893, 13915.

actions of the PSI during the rise of fascism, ousting its founder Turati, the similar actions of the PPI, expulsing Sturzo, the rhetoric of the Austrian Socialists on 'civil war', the critique of Faure on parliament, the misgivings of Seipel on party politics: they all testified to precisely this. Indeed, as the longest-serving Chancellor of Weimar Germany, the Centre-politician Wilhelm Marx, himself a fierce pragmatic and defender of the art of compromise, noticed 'parties are the organs of different worldviews', but compromises between them were so difficult because 'there are no compromises when it comes to worldviews'.⁷

Harassed and on the run for their lives, the fate of Stegerwald and Sollmann resembled those of Turati and Sturzo a decade before, who both fled to escape Fascist threats to their lives. But whereas the collapse of Italian democracy had not led to much introspection for politicians elsewhere, the capture of power by Hitler a decade later served as a warning for them. And the retreat of the SPD and Centre Party ever deeper into their own Marxist and Catholic traditions in the face of the Nazi peril featured prominently in many analyses and served as a warning to them. Swedish Socialists consistently rejected Marxist plans as an antidote to the global economic crisis and warned for possible threats to the democratic order that might follow from mass unemployment. They welcomed governing in a coalition setting, because, as the party leader stated, 'democracy's natural order should be collaboration on the broadest possible base right up to the cabinet level'.⁸ This philosophy was put into practice in the Saltsjöbaden Pact signed in 1938 where employers and workers agreed on a system of non-confrontational collective bargaining that laid the foundation of political stability. Similarly, Danish Socialist politicians praised their collaboration with 'bourgeois' parties, seeing this as an 'anchorage' of democracy.⁹ With the support of their opponents in the agrarian and liberal parties, the party struck landmark agreements on the development of the Danish welfare state. In 1934, it adopted a new party manifesto. Here, the Socialists claimed that not merely the working class, but 'the entire people should be involved' in joining the party in its effort to battle the economic crisis and political extremism of the left and right.¹⁰

Also in the Low Countries, the Socialist parties were motivated by the rise of Nazism to continue down the road to moderation and reform that they had set in before 1914. This was especially so in Belgium. Here, the Belgian Workers Party,

⁷ W. Marx, *Reichskanzler Wilhelm Marx über die politischen Aufgaben der Partei* (Berlin: Deutsche Zentrumsparlei, 1924), 13.

⁸ Quoted by Tingsten, *The Swedish Social Democrats*, 707.

⁹ Quoted by K. Krake, 'Reconsidering the Crisis Agreements of the 1930s: The Defence of Democracy in a Comparative Scandinavian Perspective', *Contemporary European History* 29.1 (2019), 1–15: 10.

¹⁰ *Danmark for Folket* (Copenhagen, 1934). Found on <https://www.arbejdermuseet.dk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/SD1934.pdf>.

and in particular its leader Hendrik de Man, produced some of the more original socialist economic thinking of the time.¹¹ De Man was the *enfant terrible* of a liberal family. From an early age he was dedicated to socialism, but always had a critical view of Marxist orthodoxies. Initially, his ideas were held in high regard in and outside his home country, especially in the Netherlands and France. Already in the 1920s, he published a pamphlet *Beyond Marxism*, translated in fourteen languages, in which he argued that Socialists should drop their anti-clericalism as well as some Marxist convictions. Instead of focusing on the working-class only and their material concerns, the Socialist party should start from their psychological needs and engage with white-collar workers too.¹²

De Man then spent considerable time in Germany, where he was a first-hand witness to the rise of Nazism. Indeed, it was after Hitler's take-over of power that De Man was forced to leave the country and returned home. He quickly took charge of the ideological reprofiling of the Belgian Worker's Party, which should in his view radically reform itself to prevent the rise of Nazism in Belgium. The deep economic crisis in Germany, which soon led to unemployment on an unprecedented scale, was thereby central in his view. This had alienated many working-class, but also middle-class voters in the fear of social degradation and marginalization. The SPD's main tactics to combat Nazism—parliamentary work and its own paramilitary force—had been insufficient. Therefore, a more radical plan was needed: the economic and political crisis was so deep that it showed the need to overcome the traditional tension between reformists and revolutionaries on the left. The result of his work was the 'Plan of Labour', or 'Plan de Man' as it became known, which argued that Socialists should no longer aim to abolish capitalism but plan it. De Man propagated the nationalizations of banks and credit companies as well as some essential industries, but not of entire sectors. These nationalizations were moreover no objectives in themselves, but a way to subject the economy to the 'common good'. De Man's preoccupation with a planned economy did not stand alone. Socialists from Scandinavia to France were increasingly willing to accept capitalism as an economic reality and escape from the debate between revolutionaries and reformists who both wanted to abolish it, either straight right away or gradually.

But what distinguished De Man's initiative was that he saw it might overcome not only the economic crisis but also the crisis of democracy. Even though he was himself often accused of harbouring Fascist sympathies in the 1930s, De Man argued that the reform of socialism in this direction could impede the rise of fascism, because it answered not only the difficulties of working-class but also of

¹¹ On Hendrik de Man and his plans to turn the Belgian Socialists into a people's party see M. van Haegendoren, *Van Werken krijg je vuile handen. De Belgische Werliedenpartij, 1914–1940* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989).

¹² H. de Man, *Au delà du Marxisme* (Brussels: Eglantine, 1927).

middle-class voters.¹³ Reaching out to them was vital, and this is a reason why De Man dedicated so much of his time to selling the plan to a sometimes sceptical party (and beyond). He advocated a dialogue with the Catholic party, a sore point given the deep divisions and antagonisms that divided Catholics and Socialists in Belgium and included references to corporatism in his plan to establish common ground. Moreover, he argued that the BWP should reach out to the middle classes, because 'the antagonism that some want to see between the unity of the working class and the middle classes does not exist'.¹⁴ The fate of the SPD showed that the broadening of the Socialist party into a party that stood open for more than the working classes was the solution. He told his fellow party members at the end of 1933 that 'in Germany, social democracy has been crushed by a movement that could only take power thanks to the middle classes. If these classes have turned their back on social democracy, it is not because it was too revolutionary, but because it seemed a movement that only strived for reforms that benefited one class of the population.'¹⁵

While putting the harsh lessons of the collapse of democracy into practice was obviously no longer an option for party leaders in Italy, Germany, and Austria, politicians like De Man also ultimately ran out of time. Everywhere, apart from neutral Sweden, Nazi and Fascist rule became a reality in 1940. This ended the experiment of Interwar party democracy even in places where it had not broken down from within. But precisely the experience of life under dictatorship provided a further stimulus for politicians to turn away from the model of the mass integration party in both its democratic and absolutist guise and define the virtues of the people's party—compromise, collaboration, and consensus—as a remedy for democracy's ills. The experience of repression and dictatorship planted a seed of growing consensus among politicians. Democracy not only required people's parties that had a broader following and stopped being there 'for their own sake', but people's parties should be parties that were willing to collaborate with each other.

The dictatorships of fascism and Nazism thereby reduced the large grey zone between committed democrats and authoritarians that existed in Interwar Europe, when understandings of democracy were flexible, and the word was widely used in different ways.¹⁶ Indeed, if anything, the post-1918 imperative that all political authority came from the people meant that all kinds of politicians and regimes

¹³ T. Milani, *Hendrik de Man and Social Democracy The Idea of Planning in Western Europe, 1914–1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), ch. 5.

¹⁴ BWP, *Het plan van den arbeid. Stenografisch Verslag XXXXVIIIe Congres der BWP. Brussel 24 en 25 December 1933* (Brussels: Samenwerkende Drukkerij Lucifer, 1933), 22.

¹⁵ BWP, *Het plan van den arbeid*, 27.

¹⁶ T. Buchanan, 'Anti-Fascism and Democracy in the 1930s', *European History Quarterly* 32.1 (2002), 39–57.

played on the vocabulary of democracy.¹⁷ Understandings of democracy could be miles apart. Seipel envisioned it as a form of government without parties, based on Catholic and corporatist principles—and argued that the paramilitary stormtroopers of the *Heimwehr* were motivated by the ‘desire for true democracy’.¹⁸ At the same time, the Austrian Socialists stated that democracy should be ‘in the interest of the working-class’ and that if the bourgeoisie obstructed the construction of a socialist society, it was legitimate ‘to break the resistance of the bourgeoisie with the instruments of dictatorship’. Such disparate understandings of democracy were not (only) the result of politicians playing on its meaning in the search for votes. Rather, the dividing line between democrats and anti-democrats in the Interwar era was simply not as clear-cut. The shared experience of persecution and occupation by fascism and Nazism significantly reduced this grey zone and provided more clarity on its meaning. It separated the anti-democrats from the democrats. This happened also inside parties, where, especially among political Catholics, the persecution by Nazism and fascism divided genuine anti-Fascists from the rest (and discredited the latter), and in Socialist ranks, where toying with any kind of dictatorship, including that ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, became ever more suspect.

The legacy of the dictatorships of fascism and Nazism was not only that it invertedly provided more clarity on the concept of democracy as these regimes faced defeat on the battlefield. It also provided more clarity on how the term of the people’s party could be understood and used. As the war drew to a close and the crimes of these regimes were fully revealed, it was evident that a strongly nationalist or ethnic conception of the people was definitely discredited. Any party that claimed to be a people’s party therefore could not define the people in exclusionary and deterministic terms but should do so in a way that emphasized inclusion and openness. This strengthened the case of those who aimed to build on earlier attempts to advocate the people’s party ideal inside Socialist and confessional ranks in this fashion. Of course, the understandings of the people did not completely overlap between these parties, with the Socialists conceptualizing it in terms of the ‘working people’ and Christian Democrats emphasizing humanistic and Christian values. Still, these were a long way from the nationalist and ethnic notions of the 1930s and both talked about the people in sufficiently universalistic ways to find enough common ground.

Finally, and perhaps even more important for the ultimate stabilization of democracy which occurred after the war was over, finding common ground also happened in exchange between politicians across party lines. This was also a fundamental experience for building the people’s parties of the post-1945 era. The ruthless persecution of political opponents by the Fascist and Nazi regimes

¹⁷ Müller, *Contesting Democracy*, 1-6.

¹⁸ I. Seipel, ‘Der Ruf nach echter Demokratie’, in I. Seipel, *Der Kampf*, 130–5: 133.

gave Socialists and Christian Democrats a shared experience of what the absence of a consensus on the meaning of democracy and a common responsibility to defend it ultimately meant. The Fascists and Nazis, sometimes literally, forced political antagonists together under the same roof. This could happen in exile, especially in London, where government politicians and resistance activists gathered and planned for renewal.¹⁹ But it also happened in occupied Europe. After the Austrian incorporation in the Third Reich, the Nazis put 6,000 members of Austria's leading political class on a train to the Dachau concentration camp, locking up Socialists and Catholics together, thus inadvertently facilitating a discussion on the causes of the collapse of their republic. The Dutch political class was interned jointly in the prison camp of Sint Michielsgestel to the same effect. After the Nazi occupation of Rome in 1943, the leaders of the Italian Committee of National Liberation, including De Gasperi and Socialist leader Pietro Nenni, were forced underground. They continued to meet regularly in the Lateran Cathedral in Nazi-occupied Rome. The leader of the Committee, the former Liberal premier Ivanoe Bonomi, wrote in his diary about the dangers while they clandestinely met to discuss Italy's postwar future: 'A patrol of drunken Germans, shouting in front of the gates from the Lateran, seemed as if they entered . . . 'We stayed for over an hour in an underground passage [so shallow] it was impossible to remain seated in the complete darkness'.²⁰ Politicians could build on these shared experiences in their efforts to build a new order after the Fascists and Nazis were defeated.

The experience of life in exile, prison, hiding, or concentration camps meant not only shared memories of imminent danger. It also provided opportunities for reflection on why democracy had failed. It brought them closer to one another in their appreciation and understanding of parliamentary democracy as an intrinsic value rather than an instrumental one that allowed their parties to maximize their support—and of collaborating people's parties as an essential element of it. Indeed, many leading politicians concluded that more than economic instability, geopolitical errors, or hyperinflation, the absence of broad-based people's parties had caused the lethal polarization which led to democracy's collapse. They should be the best remedy against democracy's ills. Indeed, as Turati observed, 'it would be wrong to deny fascism this merit: it has brought millions of hearts and minds together who believed that they were enemies'.²¹

Across Europe, the model of the people's party had thus continued to be articulated, debated, and conceptualized as an antidote to democracy's ills and

¹⁹ M. Conway and J. Votovich, eds, *Europe in Exile. European Exile Communities in Britain, 1940–1945* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2001).

²⁰ G. Bonomi, *Diario di un anno: 2 giugno 1943–10 giugno 1944* (Milan: Garzanti libri, 1947), 144.

²¹ Turati, 'Per la collaborazione tra socialisti e cattolici', 491.

dictatorship's vices during the late 1930s and early 1940s. So it was no surprise that it surfaced quickly in discussions on political renewal when the tide turned against the Axis in the early 1940s. Then prospects to test and practice with what would soon be termed 'postwar' politics opened up.

Italy was the first place where the experiment with party democracy launched after the First World War had come to an end after Mussolini's take-over in 1922. And it was also the first place where people could catch a glimpse of how the ideal of the people's party emerged so quickly. Mussolini's arrest in July 1943 was the call to action for the various Catholic groups and people who had in late 1942 joined forces to clandestinely establish a new political party. Soon after Mussolini's downfall, they printed thousands of copies of a short text with which this party presented itself to the world: Christian democracy (DC).²² Signed by Demofilo, a pseudonym of De Gasperi, copies were distributed clandestinely all through northern and central Italy. The programme had been a long time in the making. After his release from prison in 1927, De Gasperi spent much of the 1930s doing administrative work in Vatican City. He worked almost literally in the shadow of the Fascist ministries across the Tiber but was in a different state. It offered excellent opportunities to rethink the pitfalls of political Catholicism.²³ De Gasperi concluded that one of the major causes of 'political weakness' of the Italian democracy in its short life after 1918 was the absence of a party that 'united in itself all interests'.²⁴ This was a lesson he took to heart. At the end of the 1930s, De Gasperi re-established contact with some of his old political friends and made acquaintance with a few young upcoming Catholic activists and thinkers. As the tide slowly turned against the Fascists, this group became more determined to take the lead in Italy's political reconstruction. De Gasperi continued to work on a political programme, which was ready to be published when Mussolini was arrested.²⁵

For a party politician, De Gasperi started the DC-programme with a somewhat contradictory appeal, namely by stating that 'This is not the moment to launch partisan programmes'. Instead, he stated, 'in this solemn moment we need the unity of all Italians'. 'Nonetheless', he continued, 'we think that these ideas for reconstruction, inspired by the Christian Democrat tradition, but aimed at broader and more varied groups, must already be formulated so that they can become the ideas that will inspire the free will of the Italian people'.²⁶ In other words, De Gasperi presented the DC as a force that moved beyond 'partisan

²² S. Tramontin, 'La Democrazia Cristiana dalla Resistenza alla Repubblica (1943-1948)', in F. Malgeri, *Storia della Democrazia Cristiana. Le origini: la DC dalla Resistenza alla Repubblica* (Rome: Edizione Cinque Lune, 1987), 15-176: 38-48.

²³ P. Scoppola, *La proposta politica di De Gasperi* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1977), 72.

²⁴ Quoted by P. Craveri, *De Gasperi* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006), 134.

²⁵ Tramontin, 'La Democrazia Cristiana', 39-43.

²⁶ DC, 'Idee ricostruttive della Democrazia cristiana', in F. Malgeri, ed., *Storia della Democrazia Cristiana*, Vol. I: *Dalla Resistenza alla Repubblica* (Rome: Edizione Cinque Lune, 1982), 389-95: 389.

programmes' and aimed at uniting 'broader and varied groups'. A party, in other words, that claimed no longer to represent a 'part'.

About a year after De Gasperi published his plans, Konrad Adenauer was brought to the Gestapo prison near his hometown of Cologne. Like many other prominent Weimar politicians, he fell victim to the massive arrests that followed the assassination attempt on Hitler in July 1944. The prison commander feared that Adenauer, almost 70, would commit suicide, as he had allegedly 'little left to expect from life'.²⁷ But although Adenauer insisted that the commander would be saved this 'discomfort', as he himself put it, he could never have foreseen his spectacular rise to political fame. Tricks of his wife cleverly delayed his planned execution. Two months later Adenauer was released from prison. And a few days after the Allies crossed the Rhine, Allied officers visited him at home to ask him to take up his position as mayor of Cologne. Adenauer initially refused, as he feared repercussions for his sons who were still fighting at the front. But after the final defeat of the Nazis two months later, Adenauer resumed his post as mayor of the city.

By that time, initiatives to establish a new Christian democrat party mushroomed all over Germany. Adenauer later recalled with admiration the spontaneity of the local leaders who soon merged their movements into the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU). Like in Italy, plans to renew confessional politics had been simmering already during Nazi repression. After the Nazi defeat, they moved swiftly to put their ideas into practice. Like-minded politicians gathered amid the rubble of the capital to establish a local branch of the CDU barely a month after the Soviet army raised the hammer and sickle flag on the top of the Reichstag. Like in Italy, they were united by the conviction that only a party that superseded old divisions could safeguard democracy. Andreas Hermes, one of these Berlin pioneers of the first hour, noted in his diary that 'the unimaginable suffering that has affected all of us, has liberated us from all narrow political and world views and has opened our heart and our eyes for the categorical imperative of unity'. And after the party had officially been allowed to establish itself, he added that 'we are liberated from any ideas that could separate or divide us and welcome anyone in our ranks who has not been a Hitler supporter'.²⁸

The epicentre of Christian democracy soon shifted from Berlin to the Rhineland, the economic heartland of Germany, and, more importantly, the former base of the Centre Party.²⁹ Adenauer shrewdly used his network among

²⁷ P. Koch, *Konrad Adenauer. Eine politische Biographie* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1985), 123.

²⁸ A. Hermes, *Mit unerschütterlichem Gottvertrauen und zähem Kampfergeist. Erinnerungen und Dokumente aus der Haft und zur Gründung der CDU 1944–1945* (Sankt Augustin: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2012), 258–9.

²⁹ F. Bösch, *Die Adenauer-CDU. Gründung, Aufstieg und Krise einer Erfolgspartei 1945–1969* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2001), 21.

former Centre Party politicians and his contacts with the Western Allies to assert his position at the head of the new movement. The CDU published its first programme which showed many similarities with De Gasperi's appeal. It was outspoken against political tyranny and endorsed social justice and individual rights. And, importantly, the word 'party' featured only once. Rather than a partisan appeal, the document was a 'call to unity of the German people' on behalf of the 'German Christian Democrats'.³⁰

Similar initiatives to (re-)found Christian Democratic parties followed all over Europe. In the Netherlands, Catholics eager to break the mould of pre-war politics reformed themselves into the Catholic People's Party (KVP). It presented itself at its first congress both as an 'association of Dutch Catholics' and as 'a stabilizing force that provides vital support to the Dutch nation and the Dutch state'.³¹ Unlike before the War, the party was now happy to ally with the Socialists in government for years to come. It even emphasized the common ground between them. The KVP-leader asserted that 'we collaborate with a part of the masses that might not know our principles, but that aspires social justice as it is defended by Christian principles'.³² Their shared experience of war, occupation, and often imprisonment helped to build confidence among them. Similarly, Austria's political renewal after 1945 was partly indebted to the shared persecution of Socialists and Catholics and their joint imprisonment in the Dachau concentration camp. Here they reached a consensus that 'absence of willingness to compromise, a missing identification with the general interest, and a lack of national consciousness' had wrecked Austria's first republic.³³ With these lessons in mind, the Catholics of the Christian Social Party also reformed themselves, founding the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) just days after Soviet troops liberated the capital. It no longer understood itself as the political representative of Catholicism in the country but as a movement in which all Austrians gathered.

In France the promise of political unity between conservatives and progressives, Catholics and seculars, workers and peasants also had an enormous appeal. It found purpose in the Popular Republican Movement (MRP). Just like its counterparts elsewhere, the party had, in the words of one of its leaders, a 'dual background'. The MRP represented Catholics who traditionally harboured distrust against the republic's secular principles. But it also prided itself on its accomplishments as a party that had fought Nazi tyranny in the name of

³⁰ CDU, *Aufruf der Christlich-Demokratische Union an das deutsche Volk*, 26 June 1945, found on https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3070.

³¹ 'K.V.P. staatkundig bolwerk van katholieke kracht: Eerste plenaire zitting van het partijcongres te Utrecht', *De Tijd*, 25-10-1947, 1.

³² 'Vruchtbaar congres der K.V.P. Beginsel boven samenwerking Prof. Romme wil samengaan met de Partij v.d. Arbeid handhaven op grond van aantoonbare voordelen', *Utrechts Dagblad*, 27-10-47, 1.

³³ R. Kriechbaumer, 'Die Geschichte der ÖVP', in R. Kriechbaumer and F. Schausberger, eds., *Volkspartei—Anspruch und Realität. Zur Geschichte der ÖVP seit 1945* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1995), 11–101: 13.

republican liberty.³⁴ It benefited from three skilled political leaders who perfectly embodied this careful balance between conservatism and republicanism. Maurice Schumann was a former close aide of De Gaulle whom many people knew as the 'voice of France' from London on the radio during the occupation. Georges Bidault was president of the National Resistance Council. He was a great organizer and used to be president of the youth movement of the PDP. Robert Schuman, by contrast, reassured conservatives. He was such a poor speaker that Bidault likened him to 'an engine running on low grade petrol' (to which Schuman retorted, 'Not everyone can have an engine which runs on alcohol').³⁵ But he compensated for it with vision, most famously on the importance of European integration. Jointly, these three epitomizes the ambition to bring different groups together and 'realize an ever-closer union between people in their diverse social groupings and the government'.³⁶ Just like the DC and CDU, the MRP's name revealed that it refused to be branded as a 'party'. It aspired to be a 'popular movement' in which all sections of the population could gather, one that 'breaks with partisan political methods', and one that was 'an efficient instrument at the service of the welfare and the liberty of the people'.³⁷

Whereas political Catholics often preferred to establish genuinely new Christian Democrat parties, most Socialists preferred to reconstruct pre-war organizations. Italian Socialist leader Pietro Nenni had been interned at Ponza and arrived in Rome in the summer of 1943 to join the efforts of old PSI-militants to breathe new life into the Socialist organization that had been mostly kept alive from exile. He was soon elected as its leader and the party joined the growing anti-Fascist resistance. Also the SFIO emerged after the War largely thanks to the efforts of its pre-war leaders in exile and in hiding. It was part of the government-in-exile that General Charles de Gaulle formed in Algiers in 1943 and in which all political parties took part. Blum, the final Socialist leader before the War, once liberated from the concentration camp Buchenwald, also remained the leader of the SFIO, despite being 73 years old. Two years his senior, Karl Renner took up the leadership of the Austrian Socialists and re-established networks with his old pre-war comrades.

Also in Germany, the SPD tried to build on whatever activists and networks were left after twelve years of Nazi persecution. The most effective in these efforts was without doubt Kurt Schumacher.³⁸ Before the Nazis took over, Schumacher had been the youngest face on the SPD-party board and a juvenile member of the

³⁴ B. Béthouart, 'Entry of the Catholics into the Republic: The Mouvement Républicain Populaire in France', in M. Gehler and W. Kaiser, eds, *Christian Democracy in Europe since 1945*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 2004), 85–100.

³⁵ Quoted by R. E. M. Irving, *Christian Democracy in France* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973), 46.

³⁶ Quoted by Irving, *Christian Democracy*, 55.

³⁷ Quoted by M. Einaudi and F. Goguel, *Christian Democracy in France and Italy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1952), 153.

³⁸ Lösche and Walter, *Die SPD*, 107–10.

Reichstag (where he only ever made one speech, in which he famously accused the Nazis of appealing to the 'inner swine' in people). He was personally targeted after the Nazis took power. First, they interned him almost ten years in Dachau, where despite being a disabled war veteran he was severely beaten, and his already thin rations were cut. He was just free for little over a year, when, like Adenauer, he fell victim to the massive wave of arrests that followed the July 20 plot on Hitler's life. Schumacher was interned now in the concentration camp Neuengamme but survived. Once free, he moved into action. Even before the general surrender of Germany, Schumacher made his first public speech in which he carved out the privileged role of political parties in reconstructing Germany, as 'instruments' that would represent 'political ideas and objectives' and would bring order in the 'chaos' to 'reshape Germany'.³⁹ By the summer, he had founded a 'Bureau Schumacher' and he used his connections made in Weimar Germany and concentration camps to keep the Communists at bay and re-found the SPD in the Western zones along pre-war lines from local *Ortsvereine* right up to the party council. Enthusiasts flocked to the party and a year after the War the SPD already had 700,000 members.⁴⁰

Despite the stronger organizational continuity with their pre-war organizations, Socialists also desired to make a rupture with the politics of the past. And, paradoxically, it was sometimes easier for Socialists to convey this message of renewal. Their role in the 1920s and 1930s had often been one of opposition against the whole political and social economic system, a system that was now widely blamed for having allowed the rise of fascism and Nazism. But they made clear from the start that they conceived their role much more broadly now than merely waging opposition and representing the interests of the working class alone. In some cases, this spirit of renewal required a change of name—the Belgian Workers Party became the Belgian Socialist Party, the Dutch turned into the Dutch Labour Party, both with intentions to stress that they were *more* than workers' parties and appealed to the entire people—but the Italians, French, Germans, and Austrians showed that this was not necessarily so. More important was that they realized that making Europe's second chance at democracy a success required them to play a radically more committed and responsible role than before, one that made them reconsider the premises of mass party politics and allowed them to look for a broader support base and new political allies—most notably the Christian Democrats.

As such, by 1945, it had become clear that below the surface of Nazi and Fascist repression and war, the idea (and ideal) of the people's party had travelled a long

³⁹ K. Schumacher, '6. Mai 1945. Rede Schumachers vor sozialdemokratischen Funktionären Hannovers: Wir verzweifeln nicht!', in K. Schumacher, *Reden—Schriften—Korrespondenzen 1945–1952* (Bonn: Dietz Verlag, 1985), 203–36; 222–3.

⁴⁰ K. Schönhoven, *Wendjahre. Die Sozialdemokratie in der Zeit der große Koalition 1966–1969* (Bonn: Dietz Verlag, 2004). 490.

way only to emerge stronger and more appealing. After two decades of political upheaval, growing tensions, polarization, and political strife it had seemingly lost out against the mass integration party in its democratic and absolutist forms. But by the mid-1940s it had become evident that these had provided no answers to the multiple crises that hit and haunted Interwar politics. Post-war politicians and reformers could therefore build on a tradition of conceptions of a different, more consensual and inclusive conception of party politics that had only gained appeal during the War. Some of these politicians were new. But many of them, like Adenauer and De Gasperi, had already played prominent roles before. For them the Interwar era had been most of all a learning experience, and the end of the War offered the opportunity to put these lessons into practice.

PART II
PEOPLE'S PARTY DEMOCRACY IN
POSTWAR EUROPE, 1945-68

Rethinking Party Politics after the War

On Easter Sunday 1945, Soviet troops entered the Austrian village of Gloggnitz, halfway between Graz and Vienna. Just a few hours earlier, the few final remaining Nazis and their local supporters fled the town on two trains that left the small station. Over the next couple of days, Soviet soldiers searched houses for weapons and hiding collaborators. Gloggnitz was the hometown of Karl Renner, who had been put under house arrest by the Nazis seven years before. Trying to see if there was anything he could do to alleviate the fate of his fellow villagers, Renner made his way to the local commander of the troops. But the Soviet troops had different plans. They organized a car escort to the local army headquarters. Here, an assembly of high-ranking officers on Stalin's instructions asked Renner to form a provisional government. Although Renner doubted Stalin's promise to allow the Austrians independence, he did not doubt that he was the right person for the job. 'My mandate as last freely elected president of parliament gave me the right to speak for [the Austrians]', he assured. And to those who were still not convinced, he added that 'I wanted to revive their memory that I already took the country by its hands from war to peace once before from 1918 to 1920'. On his return to the capital, he was surprised to find out that 'in many communities, most of all in Vienna, political parties have come together, installed provisional representatives, and contacted the occupying armies'. Although these parties had been badly hurt by persecution and repression, first by Dollfuss's dictatorship and then by the Nazis, Renner believed that 'they live on in the minds of the masses', and that they were ready 'to act themselves as the representatives of the people and form a government'.¹ Renner quickly invited the leaders of the newly established ÖVP to join the Socialists in a provisional government.

Renner's experience was emblematic for that of many other political leaders in the twilight between war and peace. While the Allies provided food, shelter, and safety, politicians who had started their careers in the feeble and failed democracies of the pre-war era were unexpectedly offered a second chance. They were convinced that the parties to which they belonged, however small and disorganized they might be now, were the only real representatives of the people. Only they were able to give the people a much-needed antidote against fascism. Only they embodied democracy and political legitimacy. Nowhere was this spirit captured

¹ K. Renner, *Denkschrift über die Geschichte der Unabhängigkeitserklärung Österreichs und Bericht über Drei Monate Aufbauarbeit* (Zürich: Europa Verlag, 1946), 9–20.

more forcefully than at the first free political congress of liberated Europe. This meeting was held in the small communal theatre of the southern Italian town of Bari in January 1944. Here, representatives of the main anti-Fascist political parties discussed Italy's future. And while the Nazis and Fascists still ruled the centre and north of the country and no one was at the time sure how the war would end, they staked an unequivocal claim to all political legitimacy. They equated democracy and anti-fascism with parties. Indeed, assembled in the theatre, they claimed that 'we completely represent the Italian people, inside the theatre there is antifascism and the people, outside there is fascism and the anti-people'.²

If democracy indeed emerged 'transformed' from the struggle with fascism,³ it was because parties not only reformed the institutions of democracy but also tried to take away the root causes of polarization and instability by investing in their capacities to build a broad social support base and endorse political compromises. This chapter traces these early efforts of party leaders across Europe to reform and re-invent democracy and their own organizations in the mid-1940s. It shows how the belief that parties were central to any attempt to reboot democracy after the War was firmly entrenched in party leaders' minds and hearts. In this aspect, little changed in comparison with the previous postwar era. But inside these parties there were enormous changes. With the marginalization of the radical left and right came a new commitment of Socialists and Christian Democrats to compromise and consensus. Either implicitly or explicitly they rallied around the model of the people's party, visible in their programmes, but also in new postwar constitutions such as that of Germany, in the institutionalization of social partnerships such as that of Austria, and ideas on the importance of uniting social rights with political democracy which circulated among Christian Democrats and Socialists alike. By the end of the 1940s, the model of the people's party centring on compromise, consensus, and support that crossed social cleavages emerged as the winner of the postwar struggle for power, both ideologically and electorally. The people who took the lead in the political reconstruction were men, indeed, almost always men, in their 50s and 60s, or, like Renner, Adenauer, and Blum, even in their 70s. They were scarred by the Fascist and Nazi regimes psychologically (and sometimes physically—Schumacher, for instance, lost a leg). They had often been displaced, interned, beaten, and silenced. But precisely because they had vivid memories of how democracy failed before and personally suffered the consequences, they were determined not to waste democracy's second chance. United by their anti-fascism, they forged an unlikely alliance between the Socialist,

² C. Buonanno and O. Valentini, eds, *Gli atti del congresso di Bari. Prima Libera Assemblée dell'Italia e dell'Europa liberata. Teatro Comunale, 28–29 gennaio 1944* (Bari: Libreria Piani, 1944), 65–8.

³ Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 287.

nascent Christian Democrat, and initially often also Communist parties. This was the alliance that formed the backbone of governments of national unity in Austria, France, Italy, and Belgium. Their collaboration was often strained, but when things got rough, there was always 'the common ground of the resistance.... We agree on liberty and social justice, even if the words we use to describe these are different', a young Apulian lawyer by the name of Aldo Moro, later prime minister of Italy, stressed.⁴

As Allied forces fought their way across French forests, Dutch and Flemish plains, and Italian mountain ridges, these politicians almost overnight had to re-invent themselves from clandestine opposition leaders to occupying a place at the apex of government power. This was obviously the case in the countries that had been plain victims of Nazi aggression, like the Netherlands and Belgium. Here, national coalition governments quickly took over from Allied administrators. But it also counted for the former states of the Axis, where the Allies were nominally in control, but left day-to-day business to domestic politicians. While Austria was formally divided into four occupation zones, in practice Socialist-Christian Democrat government coalitions had much autonomy. In Italy, a protracted period of political transition followed the dismissal of Mussolini in July 1943. It took almost two years before the country was entirely liberated. In the meantime, Communist, Socialist, and Christian Democrat parties led the anti-Fascist resistance, slowly snatched power out of the hands of the king and his entourage, and governed liberated areas of the country. Their government of national unity regained full sovereignty by the end of 1945.⁵

Unlike in Italy, the resumption of party life in Germany was strictly controlled by the Allies. The Americans and British had fixed ideas on how the party-political landscape should look—and how not. The US State Department clearly let it be known in the summer of 1945 that 'it is highly imperative that Weimar experience is avoided'.⁶ They therefore carefully balanced between the promise to encourage the founding of political parties and their own deeply rooted reluctance to trust the Germans with democracy. The British Foreign Office captured the dilemma in December 1945 by stating that 'the greatest handicap to the development of the sort of political parties we should like to see in Germany is the fact that we are at present unable to give them power or responsibility.... We cannot expect political

⁴ A. Moro, 'Tre Pilastri di democrazia' (1947), in A. Moro, *Scritti e discorsi*, vol. 1 (Rome: Edizione Cinque Lune, 1982), 453–63: 455.

⁵ E. Di Nolfo and M. Serra, *La gabbia infranta. Gli alleati e l'Italia dal 1943 al 1945* (Bari: Laterza, 2010).

⁶ Cited with D. E. Rogers, 'Transforming the German Party System: The United States and the Origins of Political Moderation, 1945–1949', *The Journal of Modern History* 65.3 (1993), 512–41: 516.

parties to work well unless they have a job to do, [but] nothing would be more fatal to political parties than to give them a job to do in present circumstances.⁷

As a solution to this dilemma, the Allies built democracy bottom up. Parties were initially only allowed to become active at a local level and the geographical scope was gradually expanded. Moreover, the Allies fostered the development of the CDU and SPD, and, to a lesser extent that of the Communist and Liberal parties, to foster a compact party system with, ideally, two moderate parties that would alternate in office—very much, indeed, like in London or Washington. The CDU and SPD quickly dominated state legislatures that were elected across the Western zones in 1947 and often formed all-party coalition governments to underline political unity. This same spirit of unity was increasingly lacking, however, among the former Allies, as the division of Germany became a reality. The Western Allies merged the three Western zones and prepared to turn these into a separate West German state. Party politicians at state level were recruited to write its new constitution, or ‘Basic Law’, and also here SPD and CDU dominated the assembly.

There was, of course, resistance to this quick re-asserting of party-political dominance, and not only from the marginal far right. In Germany, the critique on parties was put forward among others by anti-Fascist committees and a group of engaged intellectuals who pled for a more radical democratization of society.⁸ In Italy, an movement called ‘The Common Man’s Front’ even captured about 5 per cent of the vote in the elections for the Constituent Assembly on a platform that contested what it called the *partitocrazia*.⁹ But only in France was Charles De Gaulle briefly able to provide a real counterweight to the quick resurgence of political parties. De Gaulle was an officer who had stood outside party politics, only becoming a junior minister when the War had already started. As the face of the French resistance against the Nazi occupation and head of the provisional government, he was forced to collaborate with the representatives of France’s leading parties in exile. Despite, or perhaps because of, his wartime collaborations with party leaders, he always fiercely detested party politics, opposing it with his own appeals to national unity and the general interest. As the nation’s resistor of the first hour, De Gaulle enjoyed a lot of popular support and trust. But even he was unable to prevent parties from controlling the political scene once the peace was made. He left the prime minister’s office disgruntled for his country house in

⁷ The National Archives London, Foreign Office, 371/46910, ‘Growth of Political Parties in Germany’, 20 December 1945.

⁸ G. Pritchard, ‘Schwarzenberg 1945: Antifascists and the Third Way in German Politics’, *European History Quarterly* 35.4 (2005), 499–522; S. A. Forner, *German Intellectuals and the Case of Democratic Renewal. Culture and Politics after 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁹ G. Orsina, ‘L’antipolitica dei moderati: dal qualunquismo al berlusconismo’, *Ventesimo secolo* 30.1 (2013), 91–111; P. Corduener, ‘Challenging Parties and Anti-Fascism in the Name of Democracy: The Fronte dell’Uomo Qualunque and Its Impact on Italy’s Republic’, *Contemporary European History* 26.1 (2017), 69–84.

Colombey in January 1946. The parties continued to write a new constitution for the Fourth Republic, a constitution that concentrated all power in the hands of parliament—and thus of them.

The quick return to power of veteran party politicians, in France and elsewhere, was helped by the fact that they could build on pre-war networks to take the political initiative. This gave them a crucial advantage over potential contenders wherever their rule was contested, such as happened to De Gaulle. But they also enjoyed a lot of moral authority. Party leaders were among the few political actors who re-emerged from the War with their prestige and credibility improved—even though this was largely by default. The status of other traditional elites was badly bruised. The trust in businessmen, industrialists, and other economic elites suffered from their close ties with dictatorial regimes and occupying powers. Representative institutions like the French parliament (that had voted to abolish itself in favour of Pétain) or the Italian Senate (that had stayed in power almost throughout Mussolini's rule) also suffered a blow in their authority. The same counted for monarchies. The Belgian monarchy was shaken when the government held a referendum on whether King Leopold III should be allowed to return to Belgium and regain his constitutional powers (he had collaborated with the Nazis). The prestige of the Italian monarchy was even fatally damaged because of his collaboration with Mussolini—and because he fled Rome on the night before the Nazis captured the capital. Italians voted to become a republic in June 1946.

Except for the Allies and the Church—which were both, in their own way, international rather than national actors—no one could rival the parties' claim to political legitimacy. There could therefore be no misunderstanding: parties were the real creators of postwar democracies, both spiritually and institutionally. Parties were, in the words of one German observer, the political scientist Dolf Sternberger (who later coined the notion 'constitutional patriotism'), 'founders of the state'. In the wake of the War parties were:

founded, built up, and approved, not only in the absence of a state embracing the nation, but precisely for the purpose of organizing such a state.... As far as I know, nobody since 1945 has found anything odd or striking in the fact that a state is built up or composed of parties, or that parties are created and established in the very place where once there was the state.¹⁰

This was obviously true of Germany, where the new West German state only emerged in full in 1949, long after the parties had started to leave their mark on the political scene. But as Renner's return to power indicated pretty much the

¹⁰ D. Sternberger, 'Parties and Party Systems in Postwar Germany', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 260 (1948), 10–31: 10–12.

same counted for Austria, while also in Italy the parties were so fundamental in shaping the postwar state that it became known as the 'republic of the parties'.¹¹ They emerged already in the summer of 1943, more than four years before the new Italian republic had its new constitution and the transition from fascism to democracy was nearing completion.¹² And even in France, after De Gaulle left the scene, he could lament with some justification that the *régime des partis* re-emerged quickly and perhaps even stronger than before: the Fourth Republic was very much 'the creation of party machines',¹³ while contemporary French legal scholars now also talked about an *État partitaire*.¹⁴

Party politicians realized this very well—and were proud of it too. They saw themselves as educators of a population that should be taught how to behave in a democratic fashion. This was especially the case in Italy and Germany, where authoritarian regimes had been established in semi-legal ways and had counted at least temporarily on broader public support. This showed that, as Schumacher put it, 'democracy remains somewhat alien to a major part of our people'.¹⁵ And if anyone could remedy this perceived democratic deficit, it was party leaders—at least this was their conviction. Schumacher explained this in an extensive memorandum to the commander of the British zone in September 1945, arguing that the chance for success of German democracy depended ultimately not on the Allied contribution or on institutional reforms, but on 'how many [sic] time the parties have for political and spiritual information of the German people'.¹⁶

Such emancipatory claims were not the monopoly of the left. In a similar fashion, just after having become chairman of the CDU in the British occupation zone, Adenauer made a speech on the regional radio in which he told listeners that 'the German people must become politically involved, because only political maturity can lead to freedom and to the construction of a new, free Germany. And every political involvement goes through the parties.' He believed it was the 'essential duty of political parties to re-educate the German people in their entire thinking and feeling'.¹⁷ In even more dramatic expression of party paternalism,

¹¹ P. Scoppola, *La repubblica dei partiti. Evoluzione e crisi di un Sistema politico* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997). For Germany see M. W. Richter, 'The German Party State. A Reassessment', in C. S. Allen, ed., *Transformation of the German Political Party System* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), 62–98.

¹² See for a bottom-up perspective on the transition to democracy in Italy R. Forlenza, *On the Edge of Democracy. Italy 1943–1948* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

¹³ R. Gildea, *France since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 36.

¹⁴ Arrighi, *Le statut des partis politiques*, 7, 37–46.

¹⁵ K. Schumacher, 'Politische Richtlinien für die SPD in ihrem Verhältnis zu den anderen politische Akteuren' (1945), in K. Schumacher, *Reden—Schriften—Korrespondenzen*, 256–86: 261.

¹⁶ The National Archives London, Foreign Office, 1049/137, Letter with Memorandum of Kurt Schumacher, 25 September 1945, to HQ of British Zone.

¹⁷ K. Adenauer, 'Die Demokratie ist für uns eine Weltanschauung. Grundsatzrede im Nordwestdeutschen Rundfunk über das Programm der CDU' (1946), in K. Adenauer, *Die Demokratie ist für uns eine Weltanschauung. Rede und Gespräche 1946–1967* (Bonn: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 1998), 1–9: 1. My emphasis.

the DC's newspaper *Il Popolo* stated that 'educating the masses is the essential goal of the DC. To educate them means to make them aware of their dignity, to make them overcome their impulsive instincts, their gullibility that often leads them to fall for demagoguery. Educating the masses means eliminating their spirit of intolerance and violence.'¹⁸

Parties were united in the conviction that only they could be the harbingers of hard-needed radical change. At least for the moment, there seemed to be endless opportunities for this. With fascism defeated and the Cold War not yet begun in earnest, the aftermath of liberation was a moment of 'openness' in which 'radical opportunities' arose, and everything seemed possible.¹⁹ Not only political renewal but also radical economic reforms and social redistribution should ensure that the sacrifices of the War would not be in vain.

This window of postwar openness was the only moment in the twentieth century when Communist parties were allowed a place at the table of governments in Western Europe. They also enjoyed broad popular support, in particular in France and Italy. The Communist claim to political legitimacy was partly built on the large role of the Red Army in defeating the Nazis and the contribution of Communist forces at home to the anti-Fascist and anti-Nazi resistance. The PCI fielded thousands of partisans united in the Garibaldi Brigades. The PCF prided itself on being 'the party of the 75,000 *fusillés*', a number surely inflated, but which nonetheless pointed to real sacrifices that the Communist resistance made during the Nazi occupation. The French and especially Italian Communists were also emblematic *mass* parties, which was also a source of democratic pride. The PCI had counted little more than a few covert Communist cells in factories during the Fascist regime. But by 1947 its army of followers had swelled to almost two million. It organized a range of social and cultural activities that should reach out to all kinds of different groups to build what it called a 'hegemony' in society. The sub-organizations such as the million-strong Union of Italian Women, the 'National Peasant Alliance', and own sports organizations should all help. Sensing the opportunity, Communist leaders Palmiro Togliatti and Maurice Thorez tried to make clear that the Communists left the anti-system politics of the 1920s behind. The plans for revolution were postponed to an indefinite date in the future. Instead, they pled for patience and for gradual reforms within the framework of what they called a 'progressive democracy'. Togliatti practised what he preached. As Justice minister in the Italian government of national unity, he initiated a sweeping amnesty of former Fascists in the name of national reconciliation. And a year later, he surprised friend and foe by conceding to the Christian Democrat demand to incorporate the Lateran Treaties signed between

¹⁸ G. Gonella, 'Il Partito di Massa', *Il Popolo*, 13.8.1944.

¹⁹ Eley, 'Legacies of Antifascism', 75, 79.

Mussolini and the Pope (and which granted the Church a few important privileges) in the new republican constitution.²⁰

The popularity of the French and Italian Communists—on a much smaller scale initially mirrored in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria—showed that even though a revolution Soviet-style was never attempted, the zest for far-reaching social reform was real and broadly shared. As the Socialists were also boosted by the War, just as after the First World War, the political initiative therefore seemed to belong to the left. In the first French elections in November '45, the PCF polled 26 per cent and the SFIO 24 per cent of the vote, while the MRP reached 25 per cent. In the Italian elections for a Constituent Assembly in June 1946, the DC became the biggest party with over a third of the vote, but jointly the PSI (21 per cent) and PCI (19 per cent) were larger. The Swedish Socialists polled 46 per cent in elections of 1948, the Danish Socialists 40 per cent in the elections a year before, the Austrians 45 per cent in the first parliamentary elections in 1945.

Yet the most striking feature of these elections was not so much the success of the left, but rather the dwindling of all forces on the right. The conservative and nationalist right as well as free market liberals were the main victims of the shake-up of the political landscape. Everywhere, the experience with authoritarian rule made much of the political spectrum to the right of the Christian Democrats suspect. The same counted for free market liberalism which was held responsible for the bust of the Interwar economy. The Radical Party lost much of its support in France (although it was able, for the moment, to retain some of its influence). The German and especially Austrian Liberal parties for the moment did not manage to really become a third pole in the party system. The Italian Liberal Party, despite having roots into the nineteenth century and being a key player in the Italian political system before the advent of fascism, polled only 6 per cent in the 1946 elections. The Monarchists and neo-Fascist parties soon established there were also relegated to the margins with about 10 per cent of the vote.

The postwar marginalization of the right was not merely electoral, but also ideological. The resistance that matured under dictatorship and occupation was far from a coherent coalition. But it phrased its demands in often vague but always unmistakably revolutionary terms that firmly connected political democracy to social rights. This same spirit transpired into ideas of the largest parties after the War. Socialists and Christian Democrats now agreed that social and political freedoms could no longer be separated. This had traditionally been the credo of Socialists, but now also Christian Democrats nailed their progressive credentials firmly to the mast by emphasizing that they were, if anything, not of the right. Indeed, if anywhere, they started rather on the left. 'The Marxists have absolutely

²⁰ A. Vittoria, *Storia del PCI 1921–1991* (Rome: Carocci, 2006) 59–61; S. Courtois and M. Lazar, *Histoire du Parti communiste français* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), 217–20.

no right to call themselves the only fighters against the excesses of capitalism',²¹ the ÖVP stated in its first programme. The CDU's Ahlener programme unmistakably stated that only 'a foundation from scratch' was the solution to Germany's economic problems. The goal of the party 'can no longer be capitalism, but the well-being of the entire people'.²² Social security should therefore be a fundamental aspect of the refoundation of democracy. The vice-secretary of the DC, Giuseppe Dossetti, a priest and former partisan, called this unity of political and social democracy 'substantial democracy'. Without social rights, real democracy could not even exist. Indeed, he asked himself:

What is democracy? Is it perhaps the concept of freedom realized in political institutions? No: liberty is only a means; it is not the end . . . We should make a distinction that liberalism does not make: between the formal and substantial aspects of democracy. The substance of democracy is not just about the political principle, but about the political and social principle together.

Dossetti added that viewed from this perspective, 'the pre-fascist regimes were no democracies, because even though they had the formal appearance, they lacked the substance'.²³

There was thus a broad enthusiasm to make democracy count for more than a set of political rights and to make it about social rights too.²⁴ The main question was how. Many on the continent looked in awe to the Labour election victory in Britain. Despite the larger-than-life reputation of wartime premier Winston Churchill (and his warnings about Britain turning into a totalitarian state should Labour win) the Labour leader Clement Attlee managed to win a landslide victory with a programme promising far-reaching social change. If anything, he promised not to go back to the status-quo-ante, but to turn Britain into a welfare state, most visible in the establishment of the National Health Service (providing universal and free health care) and an expansion of social security insurances to cover basically anyone financially who fell ill, lost work, or retired. It also planned to nationalize train companies and to invest massively in public housing. The Labour victory was a huge inspiration for continental Socialists—the Dutch, for instance, not only mimicked the British name when they re-established themselves in 1946, but also copied its election campaign material to woo Dutch voters behind the idea of a labour rather than workers' party. But it was welcomed by Christian

²¹ *Programm Österreich. Die Grundsätze und Ziele der Österreichischen Volkspartei* (Vienna, 1949), 29, 37.

²² CDU, *Ahlener Programm der CDU* (1947), found on: https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3093.

²³ G. Dossetti, 'La democrazia sostanziale' (1946), in G. Dossetti, *Democrazia sostanziale* (Rome: Zikkaron, 2017), 26–31: 29–30.

²⁴ Corduener, *The Problem of Democracy*, 25–28.

Democrats too. Dossetti exalted that after hearing about Attlee's victory he 'spent the first hours in surprise, fervour, enthusiasm. The outcome of the English elections seems even better the victory of a new world that is emerging.' In fact, Dossetti perceived 'three victories'. Not only the victory of socialism and solidarity, but also 'victory of democracy', and now in its substantial form.²⁵

Given the dire straits of the continental European economy, the plans for such a substantial democracy could obviously only be aspirations for the future. But this meant also that the realization of a substantial democracy could only be successful if the state was willing to engage in large-scale public planning. Indeed, Attlee won the elections with his vision of 'well-planned, well-built cities and parks and playing fields, homes and schools, factories, and shops'.²⁶ Also in this regard, politicians on the continent were inspired by what happened in Britain, and in particular the ideas of the economist John Maynard Keynes and his contemporary William Beveridge. Beveridge was the author of an influential report that carried his name, and which pled for the establishment of the welfare state, because a 'revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching'. Going against the grain of *laissez faire* economics, Keynes argued that the state should play an active role in combatting economic crises and fostering employment. Postwar prosperity should be planned.

This belief in planning was obviously not completely new to European politicians. People like De Man and his followers in the Netherlands and France and the Swedish Socialists had advocated it before. But the enthusiasm for it was always rather confined to the margins of the left. Now, it became mainstream. Its precise application differed from country to country, but everywhere the notion that the government should play a leading role in managing the economy with the aim of promoting full employment and social stability became leading. The most famous planning agency of all was without doubt the French General Planning Commission, established in January 1946 by De Gaulle as one of his final acts as prime minister, and led by Jean Monnet. Monnet was already something of a mythical figure by then, with an eclectic career that included jobs as deputy secretary general of the League of Nations (the Interwar predecessor to the United Nations), reorganizer of the Chinese state railways, government negotiator of American material support for the French army, and manager of his family's cognac business. Back in Paris after the War, Monnet assembled a small team and drew up a scheme to kickstart the ruined French economy which lacked trust and money for crucial investments. He proposed to pool the state's resources and direct them into six key areas that required investments such as coal and steel, transport, and agricultural machinery. The state too should invest heavily in

²⁵ G. Dossetti, 'La triplice vittoria' (1945), in Dossetti, *Democrazia sostanziale*, 10–15.

²⁶ Quoted by T. Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945* (London: William Heinemann, 2005), 69.

infrastructure, such as dams or the electrification of railways. The government should also negotiate labour conflicts which had often wrecked the economy before, by negotiating between employers and employees.²⁷

The Americans supported these aspirations to revitalize the European economy in the form of the Marshall Funds. The plan restored trust to Europeans weary of war and destitution, but also provided the hard-needed cash to realize some of the plans of European governments—half of the budget of Monnet’s plans were funded by the US. While the Communist parties opposed the Marshall plan, Christian Democrat politicians cleverly used American support for their own electoral advantage. ‘De Gasperi not only secured your spaghetti but also the sauce on it’, one DC-campaign slogan boasted in reference to the close ties between the DC and the Americans, implying that voting for Communists would have left Italians with empty hands—and stomachs. Marshall’s initiative to put Western Europe back on its feet and the political advantage that parties loyal to the US enjoyed signalled that the moment of radical open anti-Fascist unity was drawing to a close. By the spring of 1947, the major enemy of the West no longer was fascism in its various forms, but communism. Communist parties were ditched from government one after another in France, Italy, Austria, and Belgium. The position of Socialist parties in the new Cold War between the Soviets and the West was often not yet clear, but with the temporary exception of the PSI they certainly wanted to avoid the impression that they belonged to the Soviet camp at all costs.

As the Communists remained loyal to Stalin and clung on to their explicitly class-based notion of the party, the legitimate political spectrum narrowed further. It shows that the desire for change expressed so often in the wake of the War actually and paradoxically harboured a longing for security and stability after the feverish politics of the 1920s and 1930s. And just as the Socialist and Christian Democrat parties agreed that the economy functioned best in the form of a ‘mixed economy’ of state and market coordinated by the government and its special planning agencies, politics needed to be managed and ‘mixed’ in themselves as well. This effectively meant that Christian Democrats and Socialist jointly took responsibility for postwar reconstruction. Soon after the War ended, this search for consensus, rather than any quickly fading aspirations for revolutionary change, was a legacy of the dictatorships and the War for democracy. Indeed, the famous Danish political scientist Alf Ross observed in a pamphlet published in 1946 and subsequently translated in five languages that in Europe, ‘war and occupation provided the object lesson that forces the people of many European countries to reflect’ on what had gone wrong. And their conclusion could only be that in a democracy, the winner takes all principle on conflicts in interest, identity,

²⁷ B. Eichengreen, *The European Economy since 1945. Coordinated Capitalism and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), ch. 3.

and economy did not apply, because 'the price of victory is the destruction of democracy'. Instead, leading parties should work to foster a consensus on the ground rules of democracy, to 'work constantly at the integration of the various groups' conceptions of right and justice'.²⁸

On the first of September 1948, the prime ministers of the West German states, politicians and high Allied officials gathered in the Museum of Natural History in Bonn. They were there to celebrate the founding of the Parliamentary Council that would write Germany's new constitution. SPD-leader and hardliner Schumacher was seriously ill, so the Socialist delegation was led by the moderate Carlo Schmid. The day should have been the festive prelude to the revival of German democracy, but Schmid was far from impressed with the ambience. 'Never before an official event that opened a new chapter in the history of a great people took place in such a funny environment', he wrote later. 'We were standing in the hall of this high building below the state flags surrounded by stuffed animals from all around the world. We felt quite lost among the bears, chimpanzees, and gorillas. And despite the Beethoven music that was being played, this bizarre environment failed to create a true atmosphere of festivity.'²⁹

Whether debating among dusty stuffed animals in a museum or in the more traditional environment of the seats of parliament, like the Italians or French, politicians in constitutional councils and assemblies were united in their view that power should be dispersed rather than concentrated. In a way, they all suffered from a 'Weimar syndrome' and sought to learn lessons from the past.³⁰ Executives should not become too powerful and charismatic leaders should not be able to appeal to the people on the streets to back up their claim to rule. Democratic institutions should hold each other in check and no single institution should take precedence. Apart from parliaments with two chambers and governments, many countries therefore created powerful constitutional courts, or 'councils' to check the constitutionality of laws that MPs passed. Governments did not rule alone but based their policies on nominally independent and powerful advisory bodies such as the Dutch Central Planning Agency or the French General Planning Commission. Also organized interests were officially recognized and got a seat at the table, for instance in Austria, where the Chambers of Agriculture, Commerce and the trade unions became legally recognized government partners in decision-making. There was also a tendency to decentralize government, as the federal constitutions of West Germany and Austria and the regionalization of a hitherto strongly centralized Italian government showed. In a way, the postwar order thus aimed to provide an antidote to the cheering of universal suffrage as the

²⁸ A. Ross, *Why Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952 [1946]), 198, 200.

²⁹ C. Schmid, *Erinnerungen. Dritter band der Gesammelten Werke* (Berlin and Zürich: Scherz, Verlag, 1979), 357.

³⁰ Ullrich, *Der Weimar-Komplex*.

basis of all government power, as had happened in 1918. Power, as the new constitutions of Germany and Italy showed, should be constrained, and divided.³¹

However, precisely this division and dispersion of power meant that the post-war system required powerful mediators. Political parties considered themselves the centre of gravity in a system where power naturally seeped away from the core. This unshaken faith in political parties of the post-1945 period echoed that of the previous postwar era. This similar spirit transpired into institutional continuity, for instance in the electoral system, parliamentary orders, and voting regulations. These continued to endorse political parties. Indeed, the same Catholic lawmaker, then of the PPI, now of the DC, who initiated proportional representation in Italy in 1919, again defended it twenty-seven years later, because 'the organization of the country should above all be based on parties. The parties should take the responsibility to lead the country, just as they have done until now.'³²

In the view of the politicians who dominated constitutional councils and assemblies, the problem of Interwar democracy was therefore not that it was a party-state. Rather, the problem was that the party-state had been too weak and that it should be made clear once and for all that, as Schumacher put it, 'democracy can only function in a party-state'.³³ The Italian and German constitutional assemblies adopted articles that celebrated the virtue of parties. Indeed, as one CDU-representative claimed at one of the final sessions of the Parliamentary Council: 'We cheer above all that political parties are finally recognized in a constitution, and that we have had the courage to recognize and guarantee that political power belongs to them'.³⁴ And in Italy, one of the country's leading postwar scholars observed that 'essentially, our constitution, recognizing the right of anyone to associate in parties to determine national politics, has implicitly, but clearly, recognized that parties determine national politics'.³⁵

However, not every political movement was a 'party' in this sense. The Italian and especially German constitutions also ushered a stark warning against extremist

³¹ Berman, 'Institutions and the Consolidation of Democracy in Postwar Europe'. See for a comparative analysis of the post-war constitutional debates also Corduener, *The Problem of Democracy*, ch. 1.

³² Giuseppe Micheli in Consulta Nazionale, Assemblea Plenaria, Seduta di sabato 23 febbraio 1946, 937. See also E. Bettinelli, *All'origine della democrazia dei partiti. La formazione del Nuovo ordinamento elettorale nel periodo costituente (1944-1948)* (Milan, 1982); M. S. Piretti, 'Continuità e rottura alla nascita del sistema dei partiti', in C. Franceschini, S. Guerrieri, and G. Monina, eds, *Le idee costituzionali della resistenza: atti del convegno di studi* (Rome: Presidenza del consiglio dei ministri, 1995), 206-12.

³³ Schumacher, 'Politische Richtlinien für die SPD', 262. See also V. Otto, *Das Staatsverständnis des Parlamentarischen Rates. Ein Beitrag zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Grundgesetzes für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1971).

³⁴ Robert Lehr in Deutsche Bundestag und Bundesarchiv, *Der Parlamentarische Rat 1948-1949: Akten und Protokolle, Band 9. Plenum* (Boppard am Rhein: Boldt, 1996), 523.

³⁵ C. Esposito, 'I partiti nella costituzione italiana', in C. Esposito, *La Costituzione. Saggi* (Padua: CEI DAM, 1954), 215-43: 231.

parties.³⁶ The German constitution stated that parties' 'internal organisation must conform to democratic principles', while parties that sought to 'undermine or abolish the free democratic order' would be outlawed (something that happened twice). In Italy, many politicians were in favour of a similar formulation. Moro argued that 'it is evident that if [parties] are not organized democratically internally, they cannot lead the country in a democratic way'.³⁷ But the Communists saw such regulations as a threat. 'Who is to say what counts as democratic?', one Communist representative remarked.³⁸ What they did agree on, however, was that the constitution outlawed the establishment of the Fascist Party 'in whatever form' (an article that was applied later to outlaw a violent neo-Fascist movement—the neo-Fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI) was nonetheless allowed to establish itself).

So, the narrowing of the acceptable political spectrum after 1945 was not merely ideological or electoral, it was also institutional.³⁹ Other than after 1918, the whole set of institutions that organized the place of parties in democracy now implicitly or explicitly endorsed the model of the people's party. Wherever a constitution or law read 'parties', it intended 'people's parties' and stressed that these parties were expected to overcome their bad habits of the past. The constitution of the German state of Baden captured best the spirit of the postwar era by obliging parties to 'take responsibility for the formation of political life and the guidance of the state whether they are in government or in opposition' and 'to place the interests of the state before that of the party'.⁴⁰ In other words, it impelled them to become people's parties.

However, such constitutional articles that praised the people's party as a principle were in the end most of all of symbolic importance. They expressed the growing conviction that democracy required people's parties of the centre rather than that they in themselves created such parties. What mattered much more than constitutional change was the change inside parties themselves. Indeed, in Austria, Renner and his government allies of the ÖVP quickly agreed that the country did not need a new constitution at all. It could simply re-adopt the one Renner had written back in 1919. That constitution had been the backdrop of, first, deepening political polarization, then political gridlock, and, finally, civil war and the demolition of democracy. After 1945 precisely the same document proved

³⁶ P. Pombeni, *La questione costituzionale in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2017), 288–91.

³⁷ Ferdinando Targetti, in *Assemblea costituente, Commissione per la Costituzione, Discussioni in Assemblea, Seduta di 22 maggio 1947, Plenaria 4164*.

³⁸ Concetto Marchesi, in *Assemblea costituente, Commissione per la Costituzione, Discussioni in Assemblea, Seduta di 19 novembre 1946, 403*.

³⁹ See on the narrowing of the spectrum and the moderation of democracy after 1945 also P. Corduener, "Disconnect Romanticism from Politics". *Democracy as Moderation in Cold War Western Europe*, in I. de Haan and M. Lok, eds, *The Politics of Moderation in Modern European History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 187–203.

⁴⁰ *Verfassung des Landes Baden vom 18 Mai 1947, article 120*. Found on <http://www.verfassungen.de/bw/baden/verf47-i.htm>.

to be a blueprint for political stability and social peace, but only because the SPÖ and the ÖVP reformed themselves and their mutual relationship.

So while the ideal of the people's party was now widely shared and sometimes even constitutionally codified, the main question was whether postwar politicians would be able to put its aspirations into practice. Could party politicians of the Socialist and Christian Democrat parties compromise and collaborate? Could they consider consensus a virtue rather than a flaw, and work, as Ross had specified, 'constantly at the integration of the various groups'? Socialist parties, sometimes quickly, often more slowly, moved away from the model of the working-class party and welcomed new allies and support groups. However, the absolute pioneers of the people's party in postwar Europe were not the forces usually called progressive, but those often labelled conservative. Christian Democrat politicians had thought early and hard about the practices, organization, and ideology of their predecessors as a cause for democratic failure. And as the programmes of CDU, DC, and MRP showed, they concluded that the problems of democracy could be resolved by superseding the implications of the word 'party' as much as possible. It is no coincidence that they all opted to omit the word 'party' from their name. They refused to be partisan, precisely to overcome the ills of party democracy and make it work. Indeed, 'all sections of the people stand together', the future Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger stated at the CDU's first national congress, 'big industry, employers, city dwellers and farmers, protestants, and Catholics. This is no longer a party in the old sense of the word!'⁴¹

⁴¹ Kurt Georg Kiesinger, in CDU, *Erste Parteitag der Christlich-Demokratische Union Deutschlands. Goslar 20–22 Oktober 1950* (Bonn: CDU, 1950), 44.

6

The Christian Democrat Decade

The aspiration to rethink what it meant to be a ‘party’ that characterized Christian democracy as it matured in the late 1940s and over the course of the 1950s. Christian Democrat pamphlets in the wake of the War already unequivocally emphasized that they were movements that stood open to everyone, represented the general interest, and were willing to work with former adversaries. They continued to do so once the peace was secured, offering citizens who longed to find some sense of normality a reassurance of social security and political stability after decades of political upheaval.

This promise to end the political infighting and factionalism that characterized party democracy in the 1920s and 1930s proved to be a winning electoral strategy. As the Socialist (and, in some places, Communist) surge of the immediate postwar era waned, Christian Democrats emerged in many key places as the leading parties. In the harshly contested Italian elections of 1948, the DC almost took half of the total votes. One year later, Adenauer beat Schumacher more narrowly but still decisively in the first free German elections in almost two decades; the Belgian Christian Democrats won a victory over the Socialists; as did the ÖVP in Austria and the KVP in the Netherlands. In France, the MRP finished second in the November 1946 elections, but it fell back five years later. They were, however, challenged by another party that promised to overcome partisan divisions and rule in the general interest: De Gaulle’s Rally of the French People (RPF).

Notwithstanding its only temporary success in France, Christian democracy was without doubt the most successful political formula of postwar Europe. Their success at the ballot booth was based on a broad social coalition ranging from workers and peasants to large industrialists, white collar workers, and landowners. This naturally earned them a leading place in government. And as such, they both pioneered and epitomized the postwar success of the people’s party model. This chapter traces how Christian Democrats managed to unite the three components of the people’s party inside their movements. It shows how this contributed to the remarkable stabilization of democracy in Western Europe and to the growing uniformity of this postwar model across Western European countries. By the end of the 1950s, the Christian Democrat conception of the people’s party had become a model for others to emulate. This was first the case in France, where De Gaulle returned to power and the previously intransigent Gaullist movement transformed into a people’s party. But it counted then also among Socialists who not only watched the Christian Democrat electoral success with envy, but came to

share their conviction that the people's party was a necessary element of a legitimate and stable form of democracy.

A key ingredient of the people's party was its ability to practice the politics of compromise and embrace government responsibility. For Christian Democrats, this was not merely the consequence of their growing support alone. It also resulted from an important mental switch that occurred after 1945 to overcome the traditional Catholic ambiguity towards governing in a liberal parliamentary democratic setting. This was a gradual shift and the unconditional embracing of democracy became more pronounced in the years to come.¹ But the roots of this shift can be traced back early sometimes. Writing in his study in the Vatican in the 1930s, and representing the views of many European Catholics, De Gasperi concluded that the 'problem of the *Popolari* [the PPI] is closed', as 'today, we should prepare ourselves for a future in which, after the collapse of fascism, the role of Catholics in Italy will be a role of government'.² This new sense of responsibility was closely connected to the aspiration to overcome partisan politics. Indeed, as one prominent DC-politician noted: 'When a party becomes government, it is no longer partial, because it must operate for the good of the entire country.... Christian democrats have *il senso dello Stato*': a feeling of responsibility for the state.³

Of course, the fixation with government for Christian Democrats did not always occur by sticking to their own high moral standards. There were plenty of scandals that showed they did not suddenly erase some bad habits suspicious of the rule of law and civil liberties. Italy was repeatedly shocked by the suppression of the civil rights of Socialists and especially Communists, who could be arrested for something minor as selling their party newspapers; the, at times lethal, crackdowns on peasant protestors (one of the reasons for Dossetti to leave the party in 1952 and devote himself fully to the priesthood);⁴ and the violent repression of protests against neo-fascism in 1960.⁵ Germany was shocked by corruption affairs, and, later, the Spiegel Affair, where the Christian Democrat

¹ This graduality was the key argument of Martin Conway's work on political Catholicism. See M. Conway, 'Introduction', in: Buchanan and Conway, *Political Catholicism*, 1–33. See also: M. Gehler, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of the European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 169–170; Corduener, *The Problem of Democracy*, 51–55.

² Cited with Craveri, *De Gasperi*, 117.

³ Intervention of Mario Scelba, at DC, 'Terzo Congresso, Venezia, Palazzo Ducale, 2–5 Giugno 1949', in D.C., *I congressi nazionali della Democrazia Cristiana* (Rome: Edizione Cinque Lune, 1959), 193–322: 300.

⁴ F. Malgeri, *L'Italia democristiana. Uomini e idee dal cattolicesimo democratico nell'Italia repubblicana (1943–1993)* (Rome: Gangemi, 2004), 78.

⁵ P. Cooke, *Luglio 1960: Tambroni e la repressione fallita* (Milan: Teti, 2000).

defence minister, backed by Adenauer, gave orders to arrest critical journalists and ransack their offices.⁶

Still, these were ever more exceptions. Governing in a parliamentary setting with coalition partners (the DC did so even though it would have been able to govern alone in 1948) was an essential part of the transformation from Catholic interest parties into Christian Democrat people's parties. It was essential to foster the stability that postwar democracy required. If Christian Democrats lost their pre-eminence, the still precarious social peace would collapse—or at least so would Christian Democrat leaders like their voters to believe. 'No experiments' Adenauer warned them, to underline that the recovery was fragile and only Christian Democrats could be trusted to handle it with the care that was needed. Consequently, the CDU-congresses hardly ever discussed topics like members, organization, or ideology. Rather, they were a stage for Adenauer to exhibit his achievements in government. Similarly, at the congresses of the KVP, the justification of the government alliance with the Social Democrats was the key issue on the agenda, with buzzwords such as 'results', 'responsibility', and 'being accountable' being of top importance. And even at a congress on party organization, De Gasperi lectured his colleagues that 'the party is not an end to itself. . . . The party is *parte*, but should be of service to the whole, the country, Italy. So when you study new organs or structures you should ask yourself only whether they can benefit the country or the Italian people. This idea of social and political service should be the fundamental idea that distinguishes us from all others.'⁷ In other words, the whole party organization should be instrumental to provide crucial stability.

The Christian Democrat's electoral success provided the necessary votes for their continued exercise of government authority. But it was not necessarily the fruit of mass mobilization inside party organizations. Indeed, the idea of a mass party was by some leading Christian Democrats even seen as contradictory to being a people's party that took on government responsibility. Erhard once let it slip in a party board meeting that 'members are very nice and all, but essentially, we do not want to become a membership party at all. We do not want to be ruled by bureaucracy but rather want to ensure that men conscious of their responsibility can govern the state'.⁸ While Socialist parties quickly decided to rebuild their organizations on a pre-war footing, some Christian Democrats were reluctant whether they should build one at all. The MRP was deliberately organized in a decentralized way and in Germany, the CDU was initially nothing more than an

⁶ M. Doerry and H. Janssen, eds, *Die SPIEGEL-Affäre. Ein Skandal und seine Folge* (Stuttgart: DVA, 2013).

⁷ A. de Gasperi, 'Intervento all'Assemblea organizzativa della Democrazia cristiana' [1949], in A. de Gasperi, *Scritti e discorsi politici*, Vol. IV, Tomo 2 (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009), 1174–6; 1176.

⁸ Ludwig Erhard quoted by F. Bösch, *Macht und Machtverlust. Die Geschichte der CDU* (Stuttgart: DVA, 2002), 7.

electoral alliance of regional party organizations.⁹ The first real party board on a national level was created only in 1950, and even then, its powers remained limited. This only changed slowly later in the decade when people started warning Adenauer that ‘the party as representative of its members and voters can only meet its tasks if it has a life of its own and is more than an auxiliary to the government.... It must also be able to exist if—let God prevent this from happening in the interest of the German people—is no longer in government.’¹⁰

But although the spirit of the Interwar mass party was initially mainly kept alive on the left, it was still ‘contagious’, as Duverger observed. If it served their purpose of staying in government, building a stronger organization appealed to Christian Democrat party leaders too. This counted particularly in places where the left successfully rallied hundreds of thousands of members and the Christian Democrats wanted to counter their weight. The ÖVP had a presence on the ground with about 4,500 local sections, and an exceptional large army of members: 700,000 out of a population of barely seven million people. Moreover, it managed to ally with all kinds of Catholic-friendly social organizations, ranging from the Austrian Association of Academics to the Austrian Family Association and the Disaster aid for Austrian Women.¹¹ Similarly, after De Gasperi passed away in 1954, a next generation of DC-politicians had the ambition to give the party a true mass organization, less dependent on the Church. The engine behind the change was De Gasperi’s successor Amintore Fanfani, who argued that ‘our ideological strength needs organizational strength to defend and diffuse our ideals... the party should not be reduced to an electoral committee’.¹² These efforts paid off. The DC soon had 14,000 party offices, right from its impressive *palazzo* on Piazza del Gesù in the heart of Rome until rented floors in working-class quarters or converted houses in most remote corners of the Italian countryside. Here, the party’s army of over a million members gathered to play cards, discuss local affairs, and read the party newspaper. Even the most remote countryside villages had been reached, while the number of party functionaries was so high that ‘it escapes reasonable estimate’, according to one contemporary observer.¹³ The same model even extended to RPF, founded by De Gaulle in 1947 to contest the power of the parties of the Fourth Republic that in his view was way too much like the Third. For De Gaulle, the RPF must not be called a party. It was in its own words, ‘a mass movement, an immense assembly of all French

⁹ Bösch, *Die Adenauer-CDU*, 89–90.

¹⁰ Intervention of Josef Hermann Duffhues, at CDU, *11. Bundesparteitag der Christlich-demokratisch Union Deutschlands 2–5 Juni 1962* (Hamburg, 1962), 318. See also: Schönbohm, *Die CDU wird moderne Volkspartei*, 35–9.

¹¹ G. Hartmann, ‘Die Vorfeldorganisationen der ÖVP’, in Kriechbaumer and Schausberger, eds, *Volkspartei*, 317–36.

¹² Intervention of Amintore Fanfani at DC, ‘Sesto Congresso della Democrazia Cristiana. Trento 1956’, in DC, *Congressi*, 575–743: 613–16.

¹³ S. Passigli, ‘Italy’, *The Journal of Politics* 25.4 (1963), 718–36: 725.

energies'.¹⁴ But despite all its anti-party rhetoric, it set up a tight web of clubs in working places and factories, so-called *Groupes d'entreprise*, that would 'ensure the RPF a direct liaison with the masses' and allowed them 'daily contact with the workers, giving them immediately the opinion of the RPF of national problems'.¹⁵ It counted already half a million adherents in 1948.

Given these impressive numbers—and the extent to which political participation indeed went through parties, just as Adenauer had demanded after the War—one can understand why Duverger in the early 1950s could still confidently claim that the mass party had the future. But for the Christian Democrats (and the Gaullists), the organization of the party now had a different purpose than before the War. Their ultimate objective was no longer to integrate all Catholics inside party ranks and represent them in the political arena. Rather, they aimed to use the party's organization to broaden their base and to convince new citizens to vote for them, including those citizens belonging to groups that traditionally had no place in its ranks. The purpose of the organization was to convince the non-believers, rather than rally those who were already faithful. Illustrating this trend, the central party office of the DC issued precise instructions for local officials on how to achieve that and increase electoral success. This was not, or no longer only, by relying on the parish and the priest to make sure that the loyal made it to the polling station. Now, success depended on their capacity to convince those of other parties. Local officials were instructed to map 'of every voter of every district' their political orientation, profession, and whether they were a 'first-time voter' so that the right party branch 'women of the section, youth wing of the section' could approach them to vote DC. This also counted for those who adhered to opposing parties. Many Communists, the instructions stated, 'are in doubt whether the PCI can resolve their problems. Many socialists are bitter because of unrealized hopes . . . The action to conquer voters of opponents requires tact and intelligence and preparations. It is vital to remember that they are in a state of crisis and are sensitive . . . They should be approached, if possible, when they are alone.'¹⁶

This broad and inclusive conception of who the Christian Democrat parties stood for was innovative in comparison with still often class-based Socialists as well as with their own more narrowly Catholic and middle-class predecessors. And just like embracing government responsibility, they considered this inclusiveness essential not just for electoral reasons, but for stabilizing democracy. Adenauer claimed that 'only a very large party that embraces all sections of our people can

¹⁴ RPF, *Feuille de documentation* (Paris, n.y.), n.p.

¹⁵ RPF, *Instructions pour la Constitution et l'Organisation de Groupes d'Entreprises R.P.F.* (Paris, n.y.), 8.

¹⁶ DC, *Impegni della rete capillare. A cura della segreteria centrale organizzativa della DC* (Rome, 1958), 16–24.

put a broken Germany back on its feet. It must give a home to employers and employees, farmers, shop keepers, civil servants, intellectuals, people from north and south, expellees and refugees.¹⁷ Similarly, Fanfani made clear in 1945 that Italy could only be rebuilt because 'the DC is the party of the entire people in all its categories . . . the party of the people *par excellence*'.¹⁸

The claims to be 'real people's parties' that embraced 'all sections of our people' was not merely rhetoric. Christian Democrat parties successfully managed to reach out to voters and members of different, and sometimes opposing, social strata, status, and principles. For this, they acted ever less as representatives of mere Catholic interests. Of course, especially in the early phase, they were still happy with the supportive speeches of local priests on Sundays and the muscle of the Catholic Action social movement.¹⁹ In France and Italy, the Church organized numerous *Maria Pellegrine* in election time. Statues of the Holy Mary were being driven around the country on cars and on muleback, accompanied by slogans, music, and banners—a clear analogy to political campaigning to lure Catholic voters. And Christian Democrats could always count on the backing of the Pope, who did not hesitate to warn voters of the danger of communism and encouraged them to vote Christian Democrat.²⁰

But there was a mutual understanding between the Vatican and Christian Democrat party leaders that the Church should refrain from interfering too directly in party affairs. Partly, this was because the Vatican had less reason to do so. The German constitution not only incorporated the articles of the Weimar constitution that regulated the relation between Church and state, but also included in its preamble a reference to God. Italy incorporated the Lateran Treaties in the new republican constitution. After some hesitation, Austria also acknowledged the concordat that Dollfuss struck with the Pope back in 1933. But even more important this restraint also followed from the fact that the Church itself was in a period of rapid internal changes. At the end of the War, Pope Pius XII formally accepted parliamentary democracy as the best form of worldly government in a Christmas speech in 1944.²¹ In the following decade, leading Cardinals aimed to make the Vatican even more in tune with liberal democratic institutions and increasingly secular consumer societies. These changes culminated in the Second Vatican Council where the separation of Church and State was praised.

¹⁷ K. Adenauer, *Erinnerungen 1945–1953* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1965), 52.

¹⁸ A. Fanfani, 'Partito del Popolo', *Il Popolo*, 5.10.1945.

¹⁹ A. Ventrone, *La Cittadinanza Repubblicana. Forma-Partito e identità nazionale alle origini della Democrazia Italiana (1943–1948)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996), 40–9.

²⁰ R. Ventresca, *From Fascism to Democracy. Culture and Politics in the Italian Elections of 1948* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2004).

²¹ P. Pombeni, 'The Ideology of Christian Democracy', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 5.3 (2000) 289–300: 296–7.

From this perspective, it was not unexpected that Christian Democrats considered themselves ever less defenders of Catholics only. Much more so than before, they stood open to people with different religions—or no religion at all. The KVP, for instance, changed its statutes in 1947 so that non-Catholics were also welcome to join the party. But even the Catholic parties of Austria and Italy, whose predecessors had been very close to the Vatican, increasingly started defining religious values as humanist and universal ones. The ÖVP stated that it was the ‘association of all patriotic Austrians who support the programmatic principles of the party based on “Christian-Western cultural views”’.²² The DC made ‘Libertas’ its main credo. The rise of fascism (and, by implication, communism) showed how important the protection of individual liberties was (the party manifestos depicted *libertas* on a shield with a cross). But it also signalled that the practice of religion was considered one of these vital civil liberties, confined to the private sphere rather than having to be asserted in the public or political sphere.

The desire to move beyond the representation of Catholics only was especially challenging and important in Germany, where all previous attempts to unite Catholics and protestants politically had failed. Although firmly rooted in the Catholic Rhineland and initially strongly depending on whatever infrastructure and networks there were left of the Centre Party,²³ the CDU-leaders of the first hour were determined to avoid being seen as leading a Catholic party. Protestants remained a minority for the first few years, but CDU-leaders launched successful efforts to reach out to them, for instance with the introduction of so-called *Proporz Protestanten*: a minimum of protestants on local and regional party boards.²⁴ Moreover, Erhard, a protestant, quickly emerged alongside Adenauer as the second man of the party, making the Catholic-protestant alliance visible in the party leadership. Their cooperation, increasingly contentious as Erhard became more ambitious over the years, balanced the dividing lines that ran through the CDU, with Catholics generally more open towards collaboration with the SPD and in favour of social justice, and protestants politically more conservative and in favour of liberal economic policies. For the moment, Adenauer was able to curb these tensions, as his staunchly anti-Socialist stance appealed to protestants too. But above all, the CDU continuously claimed to unite both creeds by defining Christianity no longer only in religious but also in cultural terms, because the CDU ‘is above all a movement in which different people gather . . . This means that all Christians, smaller groups, and those who do not feel connected to a Church can find a home here. Anyone who recognizes

²² ÖVP, *Programm Österreich. Die Grundsätze und Ziele der Österreichischen Volkspartei* (Vienna: Österreichischer Verlag, 1949), 15.

²³ W. Schönbohm, *Die CDU wird moderne Volkspartei. Selbstverständnis, Mitglieder, Organisation und Apparat 1950–1980* (Bonn: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 1985), 31–2.

²⁴ Bösch, *Die Adenauer-CDU*, 31.

the general values of Christianity as source of our culture recognises the goals of the CDU.²⁵

The family featured prominently in this new bland of confessional politics and the defence of the traditional family and its values was claimed by the Christian Democrats as one of their distinctive characteristics. It was also a key instrument to attract female voters. In Belgium, France, and Italy women were allowed to vote for the first time after the Second World War and Christian Democrats there gave special importance to women in their campaigns and organizations. De Gasperi boasted that a quarter of DC-members were female and that he was especially proud of 'the exceptional work' they did for the party. There was a women's organization inside the DC that hosted activities, granted scholarships, and published journals. Also for the MRP integrating women in the party was a key priority. It featured several women's associations, published women's publications, and through its association with the Church made special efforts to attract female voters.²⁶

Propaganda and policies of the Christian Democrats were gendered around a traditional family model, with a supposedly 'natural' hierarchy and a male bread winner. One MRP leaflet in 1945 demanded the right and power for 'the man, in particular the working man, to fulfil his responsibilities as husband, head of the family and educator; for the woman, in particular the working woman, the chance to accomplish her civilising mission, her vocation as wife and mother'.²⁷ The CDU put itself forward as protectors of the traditional family.²⁸ In 1953 it created a Ministry for Family and its first minister campaigned with the slogan 'Healthy family, healthy people'. Its campaign posters showed mothers shielding children from a menacing Communist hand, just as the DC appealed to 'mothers of Italy, protect your children'. So the specific appeal to women was central to Christian Democrat ideology, with the traditional family led by the male breadwinner as the cornerstone of a society patriarchally led by Christian Democrat men in office. Still, precisely for this reason, it aimed to back up the claim that the Christian Democrats worked for the general interest and were a party in which both men and women were welcome.

The Christian Democrats were thus constantly building bridges between different groups in society. This also counted for their attempts to make their parties a home for both anti-Fascists and for those who had collaborated with the Fascist

²⁵ CDU, 'Dokument nr. 3 Protokoll der ersten Tagung des Zonenausschusses der CDU am 22 und 23.1 1946 Herford', in H. Pütz, ed., *Konrad Adenauer und die CDU der britischen Besatzungszone 1946-1949. Dokumente zur Gründungsgeschichte der CDU Deutschlands* (Bonn: Eichholz Verlag, 1975), 119-20: 120.

²⁶ A. Taylor Allen, *Women in Twentieth-Century Europe* (London: Routledge, 2008), 80-1.

²⁷ Cited with C. Duchon, *Women's Rights and Women's Lives in France 1944-1968* (London: Routledge, 1994), 42.

²⁸ R. G. Möller, *Protecting Motherhood. Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 80.

and Nazi regimes. The DC was born as an anti-Fascist party and their partisans played a part, albeit modest, in the armed resistance against fascism and the Nazi occupation. But they also offered a home to those who had been indifferent to the resistance at best, such as the large landowners in the south and to the Roman bureaucrats who had often collaborated with the Fascist regime. The same counted for the CDU which not only fielded several MP's who had been Nazi party members, but also integrated, except for the Liberal party, all minor parties to its right over the course of the 1950s. This included the German Party, a right-wing group supported by war veterans and people leaning towards right-wing radicalism. To be sure, Adenauer marked a sharp demarcation line to the neo-Nazis of the Socialist Reich Party, asking the Constitutional Court to ban the party in 1952. But he was careful not to confront too directly the country's recent dark past, blanketing the Nazi era in silence, because it might break the fragile coalition in his party's own ranks. Also the ÖVP, despite some of its first-generation leaders having been victims of Nazi persecution, was carefully courting former Nazis.

This remarkable Christian Democrat balancing act of keeping its anti-Fascist credentials untarnished and closing an eye to the recent past could be tricky. Indeed, as one MPR-deputy noted, both the 'strengths and weaknesses' of Christian Democrats came from this 'dual background'.²⁹ Sometimes it backfired. Many Christian Democrats were not only uninterested in building an anti-Fascist memory culture, but also happily ignored that former Fascists held high-ranking positions in their own ranks. The MRP might have printed 'with De Gaulle' on the back of its membership cards, but its left-wing opponents joked that the party's abbreviation actually stood for *Machine à Ramasser les Pétainistes*. It led to embarrassing situations in which the collaborationist past of high-profile Christian Democrats—German Chancellor Kurt Kiesinger was an early NSDAP-member, Austrian Chancellor Julius Raab was a minister under the Austrian dictatorship, Fanfani had openly supported Mussolini's racist laws—was rattled up by the opposition or by a new generation.

On the other hand, however, the willingness to close an eye to the recent past paradoxically had the effect of luring many sceptic citizens to the democratic camp.³⁰ Christian Democrats legitimized the sacrificing of their own anti-Fascist credentials by pointing to the necessity of their crusade against what they called the new enemy: Marxism. As De Gasperi once confided to the American ambassador in Rome, if the Cold War ever became hot, the neo-Fascists would surely fight on their side, but the PCI would not.³¹ So, in the iciest phase of the Cold War, between the Berlin blockade and the death of Stalin in 1953, traditional Catholic misgivings about Marxism came to the surface and superseded anti-

²⁹ Cited with Irving, *Christian Democracy*, 44.

³⁰ Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 290–2.

³¹ G. Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano. Culture, identità e trasformazioni fra anni cinquanta e sessanta* (Rome: Donzelli, 2005), 3.

fascism.³² Especially the DC, faced with the largest Communist party of the West, translated this anti-Marxism into political deeds. It enacted so-called ‘exceptional laws’ that curtailed civil liberties—or at least those of Socialists and Communists. Left-wing teachers and civil servants risked losing their jobs, the left-wing parties lost easy and equal access to public radio (and, later, nascent television), Marxist newspaper vendors faced arrest for breaking public order and safety regulations, and peaceful demonstrations and rallies were interrupted by the police. The DC also made a failed attempt to change the electoral system in their favour in 1953, with the aim of marginalizing the Communist opposition.

Yet even with such measures in place, there were red lines that Christian Democrats were unwilling to cross. Sure, Cold War politics were polarized, in Italy and elsewhere, but they were so to a markedly different degree and nature than they had been in the 1920s and 1930s. Christian Democrats warned against Marxism but welcomed working-class voters to such an extent that one French priest claimed that ‘Our missionary lands are made up of proletarians’.³³ More importantly, violence was unacceptable as a political method. No party had a paramilitary branch, as had been common before. Nowhere did verbal polarization lead to violent political clashes like in the 1920s and 1930s, not even in Italy, where tension ran highest. When, after the heated election campaign of 1948, a right-wing fanatic shot Communist leader Togliatti in the front of parliament, Togliatti called upon Communist militants from his hospital bed ‘not to lose their heads’.³⁴ De Gasperi visited him in hospital, in a crucial display of national unity at a time when some drew the comparison with the murder on Matteotti twenty-four years before.

It shows that for Christian Democrats anti-Marxism was as much part of a tradition as pragmatically rhetorically deployed for internal purposes. It served to keep their ranks united and placate conservatives with a deep, and explicit, mistrust of the left and a more implicit scepticism of party democracy. Indeed, if there was one element which united the very diverse voter base of the Christian Democrats, this was it.³⁵ Anti-Marxism was the glue that stuck the Christian Democrats together despite their differences in religion, social status, occupation, and their past attitudes towards the Fascist and Nazi regimes. This also explains why it was not only applied to powerful Communists in Italy and France, but also to the Socialists, even where they worked together with Christian Democrats, such as in France, Austria, or the Low Countries. Christian Democrats everywhere were

³² Crainz, *Storia del Miracolo italiano*, ch. 1.

³³ R. Vinen, *Bourgeois Politics in France, 1945–1951* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 143.

³⁴ P. Di Loreto, *Togliatti e la “Doppiezza”*. *Il PCI tra democrazia e insurrezione 1944–1949* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991), 291–5.

³⁵ M. Mitchell, *The Origins of Christian Democracy. Politics and Confession in Modern Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012).

eager to mark their disagreements with the Socialists who, unlike them, were allegedly stuck in the politics of the past. They accused Socialists of failing to transform into a people's party, by remaining parties for one class only.

Postwar Christian Democrats therefore slowly but surely came to adopt a different understanding of what democracy was and what it required of them than their Interwar predecessors. Democracy meant for them at the least compromise and collaboration between different groups and desirably even consensus. Their strong anti-Marxism paradoxically testified to this. Adenauer accused the SPD of being the same party as it has been in the 1920s, and the ÖVP stated that while it wanted to avoid 'a return to the time of domestic polarization of before 1938', the SPÖ threatened to take Austria in this direction, 'reprinting its Linz programme [of 1926] again in 1946'. Polarization had absolutely no place in the kind of society the Christian Democrats envisioned. Indeed, 'reviving old differences does not belong in our age, it will hurt the people and will not help to combat the difficult problems of the present', as the ÖVP put it.³⁶ It should be replaced instead with building the kind of social alliances that Christian Democrats forged.

The avoidance of a direct confrontation with the authoritarian past together with a fierce anti-Marxism served to close the Christian Democrat ranks and to draw many initial sceptics on the right behind the democratic order. It should also ensure that no major party to its right emerged that could pose an electoral challenge. The fate of the MRP showed that this was crucial for the Christian Democrats and the viability of the postwar regime. After the MRP set off to an excellent electoral start after the War, it was soon dragged into the mud of partisan bickering of the Fourth Republic. Governments were made (and, very often soon after, broken) not in elections, but in the wheeling and dealing of party elites behind the scenes. Several administrations lasted only a few months or even weeks, and Radical politicians called the shots in ever-shifting alliances just like in the 1920s and 1930s.³⁷ All this seemed to play into the hands of De Gaulle, who had already predicted this when he left office. The MRP had always been a loyal supporter of De Gaulle, but when he established the RPF, the MRP joined those who suspected that the General harboured dictatorial ambitions.³⁸ This not only deprived the MRP of much of its electoral support, but it also suggested that it had become exactly what it had promised to avoid being: a party.

³⁶ ÖVP, *Programm Österreich*, 91.

³⁷ The standard work on the Fourth Republic remains: J.P. Rioux, *The Fourth Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For a thematic approach see: H. Chapman, *France's Long Reconstruction. In Search of the Modern Republic* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

³⁸ Vinen, *Bourgeois Politics*, 147–58.

De Gaulle himself of course denied that he had any authoritarian inclinations. He spelled out the principles of Gaullism in a rally on 16 June 1946 in Bayeux. With his towering figure and in his decorated military outfit, he impressed the cheering adults and flag-waving children on a small stage on the town's square, soon officially baptized *Place de Gaulle*. No one present would have escaped that the timing and location were loaded with symbolism. This 'founding act of political Gaullism' took place on the eve of the sixth anniversary of De Gaulle's famous Appeal of 18 June, in which he called over the radio from his London exile upon the French to resist the Nazis.³⁹ Bayeux was also the first town to have been liberated by the Allies after the Normandy landings, and therefore the place where De Gaulle almost exactly two years earlier first set foot on French soil again. Now, amid shouts of 'take power' by the public, he outlined his plans for political renewal and a constitution. To affirm France's place on the world stage, it was vital that the country brought an end to political divisions and instability. De Gaulle told his followers that it was essential that 'our new democratic institutions compensate for our perpetual political disagreements'. He proposed a reduced role of parliament and a strong president and executive as antidote against the power of parties 'that question everything and too often blur the best interest of the country'.⁴⁰

De Gaulle found much support in society, but the main question was what he could do with it. He was opposed to turning the RPF into a more traditional party and becoming part of the political game. The RPF gained almost a quarter of the vote at the 1951 parliamentary elections but remained very much a party of structural opposition that strived for a new constitution. However, despite De Gaulle's anti-party rhetoric, the RPF's leaders were realistic enough to realize that parties could not be eliminated in a democracy. Michel Debré, one of De Gaulle's supporters of the first hour and as Senator close witness to the Fourth Republic's problems of governmental instability, wrote frequently about how the French system should be reformed. He never disputed the legitimacy of parties. Rather, he stated that 'parties exist in democracy, and it could not be otherwise. They are the natural fruit of political liberty and popular sovereignty.' The problem was that they 'deformed' public life by taking control over 'the law, administration, press and justice' and that their eternal competition and strife created instability.⁴¹ The kind of parties that dominated French politics, in other words, lacked a sense of responsibility for the general interest. They were no people's parties.

For the Gaullists, therefore, the people's party model as it was embodied by the CDU and DC was the answer to the dilemma with which they struggled from the

³⁹ S. Berstein, *Histoire du Gaullisme* (Paris: Perrin, 2001), 101.

⁴⁰ C. de Gaulle, 'Discours prononcé à Bayeux' (1946), in C. de Gaulle, *Discours et Messages*, Vol. II: *Dans l'attente, 1946-1958* (Paris: Plon, 1970), 5-11: 7-8.

⁴¹ M. Debré, *La République et son pouvoir* (Paris: Nagel, 1950), 103.

start: how to unite their strife for unity (and against partisan divisions) with the practical need for an organization that rallied voters and could back up a government? Struggling with this dilemma, the RPF disintegrated. But the Gaullists would soon be offered a second chance when successive French governments were unable to end the violence in the French colonies, which spiralled out of control first in French Indochina and then in Algeria, which was formally part of metropolitan France. The situation became particularly dangerous when, in the spring of 1958, the army seemed to choose sides against the government, landed paratroopers in Corsica and threatened to take the conflict to the streets of Paris. At this moment, the President asked 'the most illustrious of all the French' to form a government. De Gaulle accepted the offer to, ironically, become the Fourth Republic's final prime minister. At a press conference, he referred to his prediction of a dozen years before, noting that a 'regime that is monopolized by the parties has not resolved, does not resolve and will not resolve the enormous problems with which we are confronted'.⁴²

When De Gaulle returned to power, he installed a commission to write a new constitution. The commission stayed close to De Gaulle's own ideas on the importance of political stability and endorsed the president with far-reaching powers.⁴³ The president was supposed to act as a non-partisan arbiter of the political process or, as Debré stated, to be the 'superior authority above the parties'.⁴⁴ But the same model of the people's party that was in vogue across the continent also inspired French Gaullists. Their desire to break with the bad habits of the partisan and polarized politics of the past was therefore not so different from the same motivations of MPs in Italy, Austria, Germany, and so many other places a decade earlier. So it was no coincidence that the committee that drafted the new constitution frequently referred to the Italian and German examples, because 'Italy and Germany made their constitutions to defend parliamentary democracy against a possible resurrection of fascism', just as France aimed to learn from its past 'as we pass from the Fourth to the Fifth Republic and all the hope that it represents'.⁴⁵ This is why Gaullists and veteran party politicians agreed on the fourth article of the constitution which praised parties and required them to conform to democratic principles. One Socialist MP exalted that 'for the first time, the French constitution declares that parties are

⁴² C. de Gaulle, 'Conférence de presse tenue au Palais D'Orsay (1958)', in C. de Gaulle, *Discours et messages. Avec le renouveau 1958-1962* (Paris: Plon, 1970), 4-10: 5.

⁴³ V. Alibert-Fabre, 'La pensée constitutionnelle du général de Gaulle à "l'épreuve des circonstances"', *Revue française de science politique* 40.5 (1990), 699-713.

⁴⁴ M. Debré, *Refaire une démocratie, un état, un pouvoir* (Paris: Plon, 1958), 20.

⁴⁵ Comité national chargé de la publication des travaux préparatoires des institutions de la Ve République, *Documents pour servir à l'histoire de l'élaboration de la constitution du 4 octobre 1958*, Vol. II: *Le comité consultatif constitutionnel de l'avant-projet du 29 juillet 1958 au projet du 21 août 1958* (Paris: La documentation française, 1988), 129.

necessary for the functioning of democracy', echoing his CDU-colleague almost a decade before.⁴⁶

But just as in Italy and Germany, French politicians realized that reforming parties was at least as important as reforming constitutions. Three days after the adoption of the constitution of the Fifth Republic, some of De Gaulle's former RPF-companions gathered to establish the Union for a New Republic (UNR, later called Union for the Defence of the Republic).⁴⁷ Change in name should not distract from the fact that the Gaullist parties were always the same organizations, with the same small group of personal friends of De Gaulle in control, the eternal Lorraine Cross as party symbol, and the same cream-coloured Parisian building at Rue de Lille as headquarters. They refrained from adopting a reference to 'party' in their name, stating instead that 'the UNR is not a party, it is a Union... a rally of spiritual families of different origins, united by a common conception of the destiny of our country', very much in the spirit of the postwar CDU, ÖVP, or DC.⁴⁸ The UNR became the biggest party at the next parliamentary elections. Crucially, it could count on most of the active French Catholics, who were attracted to the party's conservative values and the pronounced Catholicism of De Gaulle himself. But its base was broader than that: one in six voters was a worker. Besides its broad base and claim to represent the general interest also the party's government responsibility made it conform to the people's party model. In an internal debate between those who pled for the UNR's autonomy and those who pled for a blind following of De Gaulle ('we are his possession, he is not ours', as one prominent member stated),⁴⁹ the view that the UNR's role was that of a government party prevailed. Its task was, as Debré argued, 'to stabilize the government', and he himself drew the parallel to the function of the CDU in Germany. This position was confirmed when Debré, then prime minister, to massive enthusiasm of the crowd, appeared on stage at the party's congress to declare that the 'UNR is the secular instrument of Gaullism'.⁵⁰

So, despite priding itself on French exceptionalism, the Gaullist programme clearly came to resemble that of the other people's parties across the border. The UNR claimed that 'despite what our enemies say, we are not a political movement without a doctrine, but we reject the ideologies of traditional parties. We are a synthesis of national sentiment and the French humanist tradition' and emphasized it stood open to everyone and was willing to compromise, as a political movement 'larger, open to anyone who believes in a rejuvenated and healthy

⁴⁶ Comité national chargé de la publication des travaux préparatoires des institutions de la Ve République, *Documents pour servir à l'histoire de l'élaboration de la constitution du 4 octobre 1958. Vol III. Du conseil d'état au referendum 20 aout-28 septembre 1958* (Paris: La documentation française 1991), 570.

⁴⁷ J. Charlot, *L'Union Pour la Nouvelle République. Étude du pouvoir au sein d'un parti politique* (Paris: Colin, 1967), 29.

⁴⁸ Cited with Charlot, *L'Union*, 287. ⁴⁹ Bernstein, *Histoire du Gaullisme*, 281.

⁵⁰ Michel Debré, cited with Berstein, *Histoire du Gaullisme*, 281, 285.

democracy. Men and women belonging to different political families wear our symbol. We are the real political party of the centre, which naturally requires mutual concessions.⁵¹

By the end of the 1950s, the people's party, in its Christian Democrat or Gaullist guise, had become the norm. It could claim credit for fostering an unprecedented period of political stability. This is what it brought to France after De Gaulle had returned to power. This is what it allowed Adenauer to achieve in Germany over the course of the decade. And even the notorious brevity of Italian administrations could not distract from the fact that prime ministers were recruited from the same carousel of Christian Democrats like Moro, Andreotti, or Fanfani (who became prime minister six times even), showing how also here the DC brought an unprecedented level of political stability.

Equally important, the Christian Democrats (and Gaullists) could claim credit for overseeing an unprecedented period of economic growth. The economic miracle was enabled partly by Christian democratic parties rather quickly stepping back from their immediate postwar distaste of free market economics. Once the War receded further into memory, they backed away from their initial determination to break with capitalism. De Gasperi soon stated that 'We will carry out the reforms, but in the long-term and gradually. Our sense of responsibility will tell us when the moment arrives at which reforms are possible.'⁵² The real enemy of the Christian Democrats was not capitalism, but the threat of mass nationalizations of banks, industries, and large companies proposed by most Socialist parties in Europe. This rejection also formed the basis of their election campaigns, with the Dutch Catholic People's Party even warning against the dangers of 'state capitalism' should the moderate Social Democrats get the free hand. The answer to this threat was, as the intellectual father of the social market economy Erhard explained himself, a kind of 'people's capitalism' in which rising wages and private property for all citizens buttressed economic recovery, a market economy with a 'social balance' as Adenauer called it.

For ordinary citizens, this capitalist resurrection was most clearly visible in the huge consumer boom. Many things that for decades had been out of reach of most citizens suddenly became affordable. Summer holidays at the seaside, first domestic, but increasingly abroad, became a standard for many families. And to get there, people needed cars, preferably domestically constructed ones like the iconic Fiat 500, the Renault 4, or the Volkswagen Beetle. And they drove on new motorways, such as the ringway *Périphérique* around Paris or the *Autostrade del*

⁵¹ Roger Frey, cited with P. Avril, *U.D.R. et gaullistes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), 50.

⁵² Alcide de Gasperi, quoted by F. Cassano, *Il teorema democristiano. La mediazione della DC nella società e nel Sistema politico italiano* (Milan: De Donato, 1979), 33.

Sole in Italy. All kinds of domestic appliances, from fridges to TVs and vacuum cleaners came within reach of virtually everyone. European societies saw a huge exodus away from the countryside and people employed in agriculture. This number fell from 43 per cent to 24 per cent in Italy, 30 per cent to 17 per cent in France, and 23 per cent to 11 per cent in Germany between 1951 and 1965.⁵³

Of course, despite the fact that they prided themselves on being the brains behind the postwar miracle, Christian Democrats could surely not claim credit for it alone. Several causes of the boom lay in responses to the bust of the 1930s. Italian Christian Democrats decided to save many of the state institutions and corporations that the Fascists had built to combat the economic depression (and, according to some, continued the way the Fascist Party had mediated these institutions and used them as a source of support).⁵⁴ Likewise, in France, they dwell on people and institutions that came up during the Popular Front government of the 1930s and during the rule of Vichy.⁵⁵ But Christian Democrats also learned from the past. They understood that the economic depression showed that governments should play an active role in the economy by forging compromises between potentially antagonistic groups and interests. This applied in the economic field just as in politics and it was a quality that they *par excellence* possessed. Adenauer for instance personally intervened to mediate between employers and labour unions when tensions between them ran too high. He was the mastermind of a compromise between unions and employers in the coal and steel industry.⁵⁶ The so-called ‘co-decision laws’ gave workers and employers an equal say in making key decisions for companies in this industry and were a milestone for such cooperation. The Austrian People’s Party even made collaboration and mediation the basis of its own organization: it was a union of labour unions, farmer unions, and employer unions with the Austrian Women’s Organization. Thus, the party was based on its self-stated ambition to act as a ‘peaceful bridge’ between ‘natural interest conflicts between the three key occupational groups, employees, farmers, and economic independents’.⁵⁷

The economic boom was not only the result of increased government control and extensive Christian Democrat coordination but also of important liberalization. Erhard moved ahead to break up the powerful cartels that had dominated the

⁵³ Crainz, *Storia del miracolo*, 91.

⁵⁴ C. Levy, ‘From Fascism to “Post-Fascists”: Italian Roads to Modernity’, in R. Bessel, *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 165–96; C. Pavone, *Alle Origini della Repubblica. Scritti su fascismo, antifascismo e continuità dello Stato* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995).

⁵⁵ P. Nord, *France’s New Deal. From the Thirties to the Postwar Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁵⁶ H. Thum, *Mitbestimmung in der Montanindustrie. Der Mythos vom Sieg der Gewerkschaften* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1982).

⁵⁷ A. Ableitinger, ‘Partei- und Organisationsstruktur’, in Kriechbaumer and F. Schausberger, eds, *Volkspartei*, 136–61.

German economy with powerful anti-trust legislation. And on a European level, Christian Democrat politicians, in particular Schuman, De Gasperi, and Adenauer, led the basis for European economic integration. They built on the pioneering work of, again, Jean Monnet, who worked out the plans to oversee the coal and steel production of Western European countries, eternal antagonists Germany and France in the first place, by a supranational High Authority. All six signatories of the treaty that established the Coal and Steel community were Christian Democrats. They also laid the basis for the European Economic Community, signed in Rome in 1957, which built a customs union of the six countries, lowered internal tariffs, and aspired to build a common market of goods, services, and people.

The steep economic growth of the 1950s boosted support for Christian Democrats in office. They cleverly 'sold' the economic miracle with sophisticated campaign techniques.⁵⁸ But it also allowed them to back up their claim that they were interclass parties that put at least some of the promises of a 'substantial democracy' in practice. The mediation between competing interests fostered social peace and a favourable climate for economic investment, but it surely also fit nicely with the interclass ideology of Christian democracy. Indeed, despite their contribution to the resurrection of capitalism, Christian Democrats also had real things to offer to working-class (and peasant) voters. They initiated social reforms that backed up their claim to be parties for everyone, including people in dire material need. The MRP left its stamp on France's social security system. Against Erhard's wishes, Adenauer pushed through the introduction of a universal pension scheme intended to secure living standards and the social status of retirees. The old-age pension was the cornerstone of the German welfare state—a term which Erhard detested, but which nonetheless increasingly matched reality. By the time the Christian Democrats left the government, in 1969, social expenditure consumed over a fifth of the German GDP—twice as much as when they had started two decades before—and especially impressive given the spectacular economic growth in the meantime.

The DC might have lacked a grand overarching scheme of economic renewal like the German 'social market economy', but equally dedicated the government's energies to battling poverty. It initiated the expropriation of 700,000 acres of land from large landowners and divided it among landless peasants. The reform has been critically received, mostly because the redistributed land was of poor quality and landowners tried every trick in the book to frustrate the process. But still this was the first reform of its kind and magnitude since Italian unification. The DC also established the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno*, the large-state fund for the underdeveloped South, mainly to stimulate public works: infrastructure, irrigation,

⁵⁸ M. E. Spicka, *Selling the Economic Miracle. Economic Reconstruction and Politics in West Germany, 1949–1957* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2018).

running water, and land reclamation.⁵⁹ Mainly thanks to such initiatives, the first decades after the War were the only period in modern Italian history in which the wealth gap between North and South actually became smaller.

The launching of major welfare reforms and enactment of social programmes not only served to confirm the inter-class credentials of Christian Democrats. They were also essential for them to show that the political legitimacy and stability of postwar democratic institutions worked both ways: it was legitimized from below, by rallying countless citizens in Christian Democrat movements and opening these movements to new followers, militants, and voters. But it was also boosted by delivering tangible results from the top, by Christian Democrat leaders in government. As Christian Democrats (and, in France Gaullists) strengthened their hold on power, there emerged around the turn of the 1960s a special relationship between Christian democracy, governmental stability, economic affluence, and social peace. This made the people's party that they had developed a model to be emulated.

⁵⁹ R. Forlenza, 'A Party for the *Mezzogiorno*. The Christian-Democratic Party, Agrarian Reform, and the Government of Italy', *Contemporary European History* 19.4 (2010), 331–29.

Socialists from Class to People's Parties

Sesto San Giovanni was originally a village in the rural *hinterland* of Milan. But during Italy's postwar economic miracle it became a major industrial hub. In Sesto's massive steel plants thousands of workers produced the essential hardware for Italy's booming economy. Because of this, Sesto became the stage for stark stand-offs between sections of the working class and ruling elites. Throughout the iciest phase of the Cold War, trade unionists, Socialists, and Communists raised the hammer and sickle flag here in countless demonstrations, while workers affectionally talked about their hero *baffone*, 'big moustache', Joseph Stalin. The town's militancy gained almost mythical proportions. Sesto was referred to as the Stalingrad of Italy.

Sesto San Giovanni was therefore an obvious destination for PSI-leader Nenni on tour to bolster support for his flagging Socialist party. He visited the town in 1960, right at the heart of Italy's *boom economico*. Given the town's reputation, Nenni might have expected to encounter a hotbed of working-class militancy. Yet, to his surprise, he noted that 'little remains of the workers' maximalist aims'. Polarization seemed something of the past. Instead, he noted:

by now many workers are in a situation that they must defend their position. I had lunch with about a hundred workers who represented their factories, but who are by now integrated in their companies. [They have] a completely new psychology and new ambitions. They want to count for more and participate in power: this is their common aspiration now.¹

This aspiration to participate in power was something which Socialist leaders increasingly shared. And it led to a reform of their ideology and organization.² This chapter traces their successful efforts of turning Marxist class parties into people's parties and shows that, just as with the Christian Democrats before, the motivation to overcome party political polarization and stabilize democracy was often leading in these efforts. It first outlines the challenges that both their ideological programmes and their model of class-party organization faced in a

¹ P. Nenni, *I diari di Pietro Nenni*, Vol. 2: *Gli anni del centro-sinistra 1957–1966* (Milan: SugarCo, 1982/3), 97.

² C. Cavanagh, 'The Long Fifties: The Politics of Socialist Programmatic Revision in Britain, France and Germany', *Contemporary European History* 2.1 (1993), 17–34; Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 314–20; Corduener, *The Problem of Democracy*, 66–9.

time of quick social and economic modernization. This challenge culminated by the mid-1950s in a crisis of identity and support, especially for the more traditional Socialist parties of France, Germany, and Italy. The chapter then traces how the model of the people's party that reached beyond their working-class base and endorsed government responsibilities came to serve as a compass during their transition. By the early 1960s most Socialist parties had implicitly or explicitly embraced this model of the people's party, and this brought an unprecedented period of political stability to the continent.

Just like after the First World War, the main Socialist parties initially adhered to their pre-war programmes and ideological assumptions. The SPD, for instance, still formally stuck to the programme it adopted in Heidelberg in 1925 and which was heavily influenced by Kautsky's dark warnings of the class struggle. The SPÖ did not formally repudiate its Linz programme that attempted to reconcile dedication to parliamentary democracy with notions such as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. The same counted for Guy Mollet, a former resistance captain who succeeded Blum as leader of the SFIO. He argued that the concept still had value. It signified that 'if time is ripe workers who are a majority will take political power and that the proletariat, during the time needed for an economic and social transformation, takes over in the name of the majority that has wanted this dictatorship'.³

However, about a decade after the War, the traditional Socialist model of the mass party increasingly showed signs of fracture. Experiences with authoritarianism in the recent past at home and the dictatorships of 'real existing Socialism' in Eastern Europe in the present made revolutionary language ever more suspicious. Because of the interventions of public intellectuals like Raymond Aron and Hannah Arendt the alleged overlap between Marxism and fascism as totalitarian ideologies and regimes stood at the foreground of public and political debates. The Cold War left no room for the kind of word play of people like Mollet. And if this were not enough, the pressure on Socialists to scrutinize their own ideological roots increased further after the events of 1956, when at the Comintern congress the new Soviet leader Nikita Krushchev denounced his predecessor Stalin in unmistakable terms, but the Warsaw Pact intervened militarily in Hungary when it defied Moscow's rule.

The events of 1956 were of course a major challenge for Western European Communists. The Italian, and to a lesser extent also French, Communist parties began to distance themselves more from Moscow, albeit slowly and partly.⁴ But

³ G. Mollet, *Le vrai visage du Socialisme. Conférence donnée le 4 décembre 1951 à Strasbourg sur l'invitation des Associations d'Étudiants Strasbourgeois* (Paris: Librairie de Municipalités, 1951), 27.

⁴ M. Lazar, 'Les partis communistes italien et français et l'après-staline', *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 28.4 (1990), 3–13.

the events also put the relation of Marxism to democracy more generally in the spotlight. Liberals and Christian Democrats were eager to argue that '1956' was not a Soviet aberration, but that there was something inherently wrong with Marxism itself. It showed that 'real existing socialism' necessarily trampled individual liberties and that Marxism was incompatible with parliamentary democracy. Adenauer continued to spark fear among German voters that 'all Marxist roads', including that of the SPD, 'lead to Moscow'—as a famous CDU-add claimed at the time. And therefore, it impelled Socialists to come clear once again on the question where their ultimate loyalty lied: Marxism or parliamentary democracy (and the respect for individual liberties and free market capitalism that came with it).

The challenge to Marxism as an ideological point of reference was matched by increasingly pressing misgivings about the Socialist model of mass party organization that sought to rally a single class. After the War, Socialists scrambled to rebuild their pre-war networks and relaunched their parties based on the same premise of a heavy Socialist bureaucracy that sought to integrate its followers inside the party ranks. The SPD remained the classic example, but also the SFIO and PSI were very active in combatting their Communist rivals for working-class sympathy. The SFIO had the *Groupes Socialistes d'Entreprises* and 'central workers commissions' that should help the party to wage propaganda among factory workers. One of Mollet's allies praised such direct engagement by claiming that 'working-class militants have come to our sections out of a sentiment of injustice they feel toward the regime, they come from an instinct of revolt, to fight, to transform society and not to be present at academic discussions'.⁵ The PSI employed more than 1,300 party functionaries, who, not discouraged by their bad pay and lack of resources, tirelessly visited working class neighbourhoods and grim postwar apartment blocks to enlist new members. Milan alone had over 300 Socialist sections where local militants met, read party literature, and discussed political developments.⁶ Rodolfo Morandi, the staunch former chief of the National Liberation Committee for Northern Italy and Nenni's right hand, invested enormously in the party's capacity to rally ordinary citizens close to (or in) their homes and work. The party invested in the formation of so-called *Nuclei Aziendali Socialisti*, or 'socialist units at the firm'. This was the smallest base of party activity where as few as five party members could gather and form a hub of Socialist presence at work. The SPD propagated similar virtues and published instructions on the usage of party symbols that stated that 'the red flag is the sign of truth of the believers in free democratic socialism' and that 'the salutation

⁵ Guy Mollet, cited with H. G. Simmons, *French Socialists in Search of a Role 1956–1967* (Ithaca and London: NCROL, 1970), 182.

⁶ P. Mattered, *Il Partito Inquieto. Organizzazione, passioni e politica dei socialisti italiani dalla Resistenza al miracolo economico* (Rome: Carocci, 2004), 82–7.

“comrade” in the party is the expression of common large ideas and expression of a special solidarity’.⁷

However, as Nenni noticed visiting Sesto San Giovanni, workers who reaped the fruits of the postwar economic boom were ever-less interested in sharing their ‘instinct of revolt’ on endless party meetings. Rather, they seemed to doubt whether the mass party was something they aspired to belong to at all. In an evocative description, the Austrian painter and writer Karl Bednarik wrote about the emergence of ‘a new type of worker’. The ‘Interwar worker’ used to be a ‘hat-hostile, short-hatched youngster who happily marched singing behind the “flag or progress” for which he was also willing to die’. But now, profiting from a booming economy, the worker ‘cannot be found in closed organizations. He is more hidden than their predecessors’. Instead of marching and demonstrating, the new worker spent his time at the movies, Bednarik observed, and ‘in any case he is not represented by the youth movements of political parties and groups . . . he is absent from official life’.⁸

This ‘absence from official life’ inside the parties showed clearly. The PSI lost 300,000 of its 800,000 members in the 1950s, showing how the party quickly lost touch with those it claimed to represent. The SPD lost four out of ten members at the same time. And it failed to attract new ones. The party’s organizational committee rang the alarm bell at the party’s congress in 1952 in dramatic and unmistakably existentialist terms: ‘Looking at the demographic composition of our membership base those older than 45 dominate, while younger generations are scarily absent We must be much more and much more intensively engaged with organizational questions than before . . . focusing on growth so that the SPD *can continue to exist also in the following decades* and can become a decisive factor in German politics.’⁹

This aspiration to become a ‘decisive factor’ was very much alive among Socialists in the late 1950s. And with their organizational model in crisis, their ideological point of reference in disrepute, and their politicians in parliament marginalized from Gaullist France to DC-dominated Italy to CDU-dominated Germany, Socialists needed radical change. The SPD has often been considered exemplary for what this change looked like and for how Socialist parties transformed from mass parties into people’s parties.¹⁰ And while there were many propagators of a

⁷ SPD, *Zur Parteidiskussion. Empfehlungen des Parteivorstandes und des Parteiausschusses* (Bonn: Vorstand der SPD, 1954), 14.

⁸ K. Bednarik, *Der junge Arbeiter von heute—ein neuer Typ* (Stuttgart: Gustav Klipper Verlag, 1953), 17, 19–20.

⁹ Egon Franke at the party conference of 1952: SPD, *Protokoll der Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands vom 24. bis 28. September 1952 in Dortmund* (Bonn, 1952), 171. My emphasis.

¹⁰ Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 317.

new identity in SPD-ranks, the face of the SPD's makeover was probably Willy Brandt.¹¹ As mayor of West Berlin, whose division became the symbol of the stand-off between the superpowers, Brandt enjoyed unrivalled access to world leaders and global media. He seemed the voice and face of a new generation of forward-looking Socialists. 'The magazines of the world took hold of him and of his pretty wife. To be photographed with him was honourable and profitable...', the future Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky remarked.¹² Brandt had clashed with Schumacher, whom he blamed for having 'an authoritarian attitude' and whom he accused of making only a few 'cosmic changes' in the SPD, rather than fundamentally rethinking the role of a Socialist party in Germany's new-born democracy.¹³ Brandt challenged Marxism in the party, stating that 'we cannot do anything with a primitive understanding of history based on historical determinism'. The SPD seemed to be living 'in the era of windmills and post carriages rather than stratosphere rockets and nuclear energy'.¹⁴

With a group of like-minded politicians, Brandt gradually moved the SPD into a new direction. The resistance to the integration of Germany in the West was dropped and replaced with a commitment to both European integration and NATO. The Marxist-inspired economic programmes with a heavy emphasis on nationalizations and state control were replaced with mixed economics starting from welfare programmes and participation of employees in the management of businesses (so-called 'co-decision'). And any ambivalence that had remained over the party's allegiance to parliamentary democracy made way for an unconditional acceptance of democracy as both a means and an end. This finally closed the gap between short-term aims (piecemeal reforms within the framework of a capitalist democracy) and long-term ones (a socialist society) almost a century after the party had been founded. These changes were enshrined in a new programme, adopted at the party conference in Bad Godesberg, just south of Bonn on the Rhine, in 1959.¹⁵ The party campaigned simply with the slogan 'Germany. Yes' to underline it had moved away from class politics.

The make-over of the SPD was of course motivated by the desire to exit the political ghetto. But it was motivated too by the conviction that the SPD should turn into a people's party to further stabilize democracy in the Federal Republic. The notion that only as a broad people's party could the SPD be really democratic

¹¹ B. W. Bouvier, *Zwischen Godesberg und Großer Koalition. Der Weg der SPD in die Regierungsverantwortung. Außen, sicherheits- und deutschlandpolitische Umorientierung und gesellschaftliche Öffnung der SPD 1960–1966* (Bonn: Dietz Verlag, 1990).

¹² Bruno Kreisky, cited with B. Marshall, *Willy Brandt. A Political Biography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 36.

¹³ Cited with B. Marshall, *Willy Brandt. A Political Biography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 25.

¹⁴ W. Brandt, 'Redebeitrag des Berliner Delegierten Brandt auf dem Parteitag der SPD in Hamburg 25. Mai 1950', in W. Brandt, *Berliner Ausgaben. Auf dem Weg nach vorn. Willy Brandt und die SPD, 1947–1972* (Bonn: Dietz Verlag, 2000), 138–42: 140.

¹⁵ Schönhoven, *Wendjahre*, 486–7.

had been central to the thinking of Brandt ever from the start. Already in one of his first contributions to the local SPD-board in Berlin in 1949, he emphasized that 'we should not speak of socialism, but about democratic socialism' when the party referred to itself, and that 'it does not have a class goal, only a human goal'.¹⁶ This same conviction carried the Godesberg programme and the SPD's increasingly openly expressed government ambitions. It stated that:

it is crucial that we as social democratic people's party support the state in the most positive, practical and general-interest way possible... we must very consciously identify with the general interest of the people. The flag and the national anthem belong to us just as much as they belong to anyone else in this republic.¹⁷

The SPD's conviction that to support and stabilize democracy it should be a people's party was mirrored elsewhere. With the adoption of new party programmes and steps towards new government coalitions the process of Socialist transformation from class into people's parties was in full swing. The Dutch, Danish, Swedish, and Belgian Socialist parties had already gone a long way in this direction. Even more than before, these moderate Socialist parties embraced government responsibility and saw it as their task to make policies from which all citizens—not merely those of working-class background—profited. The Swedish ideology of the 'people's home' in which there was specific attention to the so-called 'little people' that formed the party's electoral core made place for a concern for middle-class wage earners that should also profit from the government's increasingly extensive social policies. As such, it was the culmination of a long process in which Swedish socialism had become ever more moderate in its means and ends.¹⁸

The PSI equally believed it should move beyond structural opposition against what it until recently called the 'clerical-fascist state' of the DC and the capitalist system. Nenni argued that 'a century on, the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat has to be rethought and reconsidered', and concluded that the 'road of socialism can only be that of democracy' in its parliamentary form'.¹⁹ Nenni sought collaboration with the Christian Democrats, aimed to mediate between workers and Italy's elites, and to enter what he referred to as the *stanza dei bottoni*, the government rooms (and backrooms) where important decisions were being

¹⁶ Willy Brandt, 'Rede des Vertreters des SPD-Parteivorstands in Berlin, Brandt, auf dem VI landesparteitag SPD, 8 Mai 1949', in Willy Brandt, *Auf dem Weg nach vorn*, 99–130: 108.

¹⁷ Erich Ollenhauer at SPD, *Nach dem Wahlerfolg weiter voran. Arbeitstagung der sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands am 27/28 November 1961 in Bad Godesberg* (Bonn, 1961), 21.

¹⁸ Esping-Andersen, 'The Making of a Social-Democratic Welfare State', 47.

¹⁹ P. Nenni, 'Luci ed ombre sul XX Congresso di Mosca' (1956), in P. Nenni, *Le prospettive del socialismo dopo la destalinizzazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 1962), 11–32: 16; P. Nenni, 'I vergognosi fatti del rapporto segreto di Krusciov' (1956), in P. Nenni, 33–51: 33.

taken.²⁰ Just as with the SPD, the motivation to stabilize democracy was central to the transformation of the PSI. Nenni emphasized that the government coalition between Socialists and Christian Democrats and the spirit of compromise and collaboration that it inspired meant 'something very important for who understands political stability and the security of democracy not with the exclusivity of a party, or, indeed, the hegemony of one leading party', but instead with broadening of the social base of the government.²¹ Some militants credited Nenni for saving Italian democracy from the confrontation between Socialists and Catholics which had damaged democracy in the 1920s. Others saw it as an opportunity to reform the party itself, putting the effort to 'democratize' the party front and central in this reform and do away with any remains of its earlier collaboration with the PCI, stressing the common ground with the DC instead.²²

Likewise, the SPÖ also adopted a new staunchly anti-Communist and pro-Reformist party programme that underlined the close connection between the people's party model and the stabilization of democracy. The death of the First Republic became the party's main point of reference and constituted a trauma from which the SPÖ drew the conclusion that the polarization strategy that it followed before the War should never be repeated. Instead, it accepted now formally 'a democratic country without a socialist majority' where progress could only be reached 'by an understanding between the classes', as the chief editor of the party newspaper argued.²³ Critical members who challenged this new line were side-lined or even received a speaking ban on party meetings.

The SPD therefore rightly stated at Godesberg that European Socialist parties were all going through the same process. This eventually even counted, even though more slowly, for the French Socialists.²⁴ While the other Socialist parties regained some of their previous prominence and self-assurance, the SFIO lost voters and members with terrifying speed. It had barely 100,000 members, one-tenth of the figure of the reinvigorated SPD under Brandt's leadership. Moreover, as De Gaulle's reforms gave the president a clear working majority in parliament, the Socialist default position, one foot in and one foot outside the corridors of government power, was no longer possible. It was obvious that the SFIO, in comparison with its sister parties abroad, had postponed adaption to the new

²⁰ P. Mattera, *Storia del PSI 1892-1994* (Rome: Carocci, 2010), 185-90.

²¹ P. Nenni, 'Il governo Fanfani di centro-sinistra' (1962), in P. Nenni, *Il Socialismo nella democrazia. Realtà e presente* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1966), 195-236: 221.

²² For an eyewitness account on the formation of the centre-left see G. Tamburrano, *Storia e cronaca del centro-sinistra* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1971); for plans to reform the party see G. Tamburrano, *Per un partito socialista moderno. Contributo al Convegno di organizzazione del PSI. Roma 28-29 Giugno 1964* (Rome: Azione comune, 1964).

²³ Quoted by F. Weber, 'Die Angst der Parteiführung vorm Klassenkampf. Die SPÖ 1945-1950', in P. Pelinka and G. Steger, eds, *Auf dem Weg zur Staatspartei. Zu Geschichte und Politik der SPÖ seit 1945* (Vienna, 1988), 11-22: 15.

²⁴ Cavanagh, 'The Long Fifties', 30-1.

political and economic context for too long. It now needed not merely strategic and programmatic renewal, but a complete reset.

Just as was the case with the SPD, it took an outsider to take the French Socialists on the belated road to reform: François Mitterrand.²⁵ In the same year as Brandt for the second time campaigned for the Chancellorship, Mitterrand made his first bid to the presidency. By then, he already had had an exceptional and eclectic political career in which he united various French political currents into his own person. Born into an upper middle-class provincial Catholic family, he went to study in Paris in the 1930s. Here, he seemed to have been attracted to, if not a member of, some of the far-right leagues that dominated the streets in those days. During the War, he first worked as an official for the Vichy regime (and was decorated for his services), before becoming active in the French resistance, first in France itself, and later in London and Algiers. After the War, he became involved in a small left-wing but non-socialist party, and later he was Interior Minister.²⁶ When De Gaulle returned to power in 1958, Mitterrand became one of the most outspoken critics of the General, holding him responsible for a 'permanent coup d'état'.²⁷ But he also cherished the ambition to run for the presidency himself. This is what he did in 1965 when he humbled De Gaulle into an unexpected run-off, in which Mitterrand captured 45 per cent of the vote.

Mitterrand election defeat seemed like a glorious victory, and it made him the rising star of the French Left. It allowed him to dominate the debates in the SFIO even though he was no part of it. The SFIO reformed itself into the *Parti Socialiste* (PS) in 1969, marking a new beginning, but the party lacked leadership and a clear vision on how to finally unite its Socialist principles with exercising power. Mitterrand possessed both. By means of a cleverly engineered coup supported by centrist and reform-minded politicians, Mitterrand snatched the leadership of the PS. Mitterrand's programme of renewal was centred on one thing only: the conquest of power. He not only realized that the presidential system of France offered unique opportunities to the left, but also believed that only by fully prevailing power over principles the transformation of the old SFIO into a modern PS would be complete. Indeed, as he told the PS-congress it was essential that 'now that our party exists, I want its mission to be to conquer. In terms of its techniques, we call this the majority convocation of our party. I want this party to take power.'²⁸ It helped that Mitterrand did not seem to possess strong Marxist convictions himself. He was arguably more a republican than a Socialist.²⁹

²⁵ For Mitterrand and the making of the PS, see D. Bell and D. Criddle, *Exceptional Socialists. The Case of the French Socialist Party* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and J. Moreau, 'Le congrès d'Épinay-sur-seine du parti socialiste', *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire* 65.1 (2000), 81–96.

²⁶ D. Bell, *Francois Mitterrand. A Political Biography* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 4–20.

²⁷ F. Mitterrand, *Le coup d'État permanent* (Paris: Plon, 1964).

²⁸ François Mitterrand, quoted by Bergounioux and Grunberg, *L'ambition et le remords*, 281.

²⁹ Bergounioux and Grunberg, *L'ambition et le remords*, 300.

Indeed, personally, he was in favour of a socialism *à la suédoise* as he called it, 'Sweden-style', and willing to reach out to the electorate at large. In the 1965 elections, he ran against De Gaulle not on behalf of the left, but 'on behalf of all republicans', as he stated himself. In parliament, he was not part of any faction, but decided to sit with the curious group of the *non-inscrits*. And four years later, while the Socialists were busy hair picking at their foundational congress about dozens of resolutions, Mitterrand embarked on a *tour de France* to 'rally the base'—reaching out over the heads of party militants to all sympathizers—he only joined the PS two years later. Then, with Mitterrand, the PS had finally a leader who increasingly made the Socialists at ease with taking on governmental responsibility and who was able to attract broad enough support to match its claims to power.

The broadening of the base of Socialist parties, in France and elsewhere, also affected their attitude to religion in general, and to Catholic voters in particular. Just as Christian Democrats aimed to become interclass parties and paid particular attention to wooing working-class voters, Socialists had particular concern to underline their tolerance of Catholicism. Nenni was among the first to open what he called 'a dialogue with the Catholic Left'.³⁰ The aim was not just the search for an alliance with the DC, but also to demonstrate his party's autonomy (and difference) from communism and a tolerance of political Catholics as like-minded democrats. Socialists and Catholics had more in common than they had always been willing to admit, and their relationship was essential from the perspective of construction stable democracies. Similarly, the SPÖ in stark contrast to its anti-clerical politics of before the War, stressed in its new party programme adopted in 1958 that 'Socialism and religion are no opposites. Every religious person can at the same time be a Socialist'.³¹

The SPD drew the same conclusion around the same time, and for the same reasons.³² The party board discussed religion extensively and concluded that giving Catholics more room in the party—and improving the relationship between the SDP and Catholic voters more generally—was essential, because 'the opposition between Socialism and Catholics has in various European countries played in the hands of anti-democratic forces'. Therefore, 'understanding between Catholics and Social democracy' was essential 'not for tactical-electoral reasons [...] but for the democratic future of our people'.³³ Similarly, the Dutch Socialists established a new self-styled 'break-through party' which they baptized the 'Party of Labour' (rather than of 'workers') and which claimed to be 'a people's

³⁰ M. Degl'Innocenti, *Storia del PSI. III. Dal Dopoguerra a Oggi* (Bari: Laterza, 1993), 196.

³¹ SPÖ, *Das Parteiprogramm 1958* (Vienna, 1958), 7.

³² M. E. Ruff, 'Building Bridges between Catholicism and Socialism: Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde and the Social Democratic Party of Germany', *Contemporary European History* 29.2 (2020), 155–70.

³³ SPD, *Der Katholik und die SPD* (Bonn: Vorstand der SPD, 1959), 7.

party in the broadest sense of the term' ditching old dogmas along the way.³⁴ It offered protestants and Catholics a place in different 'working communities' in the party organization, singled out the KVP as its obvious partner, and adopted motions which stated that the party was open 'to persons of radically different world views' and that it 'appreciated' when party members openly practised their religion.³⁵

At different speeds, the Western Europe's Socialist parties all turned into people's parties. They were proud of it too, making every effort to shed the image (still projected on them by Christian Democrats for electoral reasons) that they only catered to the interests of the working class. The Socialist membership and voter base became slowly more diverse. Inclusiveness became key. This even counted for parties like the PSI that were still reluctant to denounce too openly their working-class identity. Still, membership in Italy's industrial hubs and the traditionally red-voting centre regions declined, while white-collar workers flocked to the party. Similarly, the growing electoral fortunes of the PS were based on the ability of the party, and Mitterrand, to attract voters beyond its working-class core. This meant that Socialists claimed to represent virtually everyone—just like the Christian Democrats already claimed they did. The SPÖ stated it was now a party 'of all working people', not merely workers. These formed 'a social community of destiny' as also independents, farmers, academics, and intellectuals were now welcomed in the party. SPD explicitly claimed that 'it is a true depiction of the social composition of the people. It is a people's party'.³⁶

Closely related to the changing profile of their voters were the sweeping changes in the economic programmes of Socialist parties. The SPD observed the rise of 'new middle classes' that with 'social revolution' no longer intended 'bombs and barricades' but a 'will to a social realization of democracy'.³⁷ Any remaining aspirations to overcome capitalism were abandoned. Socialist parties closed a century of fierce debates between revolutionaries and reformists with a victory of the latter. No longer did they debate whether capitalism should be overcome, either slowly by piece-meal reforms or quickly by revolutionary action. Capitalism was accepted not just as economic reality, but also because it guaranteed

³⁴ "De komende Gemeenteraadverkiezingen", overdruk uit "De Gemeente", Maandblad van de Sectie, "Gemeente en Provincie" van 15 december 1948', International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Archive PVDA, Stukken betreft het 2^e Congres der PVDA (April 1949), map 150.

³⁵ Cited with B. Mellink, 'Tweedracht maakt macht. De PVDA, de doorbraak en de ontluikende polarisatiestrategie', *Bijdrage en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 126.2 (2011), 30–53: 39.

³⁶ Klaus Schütz at the *SPD-Parteitag vom 23 bis 27 November 1964 in Karlsruhe. Unkorrigiertes Protokoll Dritter Verhandlungstag. Arbeitsgemeinschaft E. Die Öffentlichkeitsarbeit der Mitgliederpartei* (Bonn, 1964), 19.

³⁷ F. Borinski, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und politisches Bewusstsein in Deutschland*. Referat auf den Sekretärkonferenzen der SPD, Mai bis Juni 1952 (Bonn: Vorstand der SPD, 1952), 15.

individual freedoms fundamental for democracy. Just like Christian Democrats, Socialists now argued that 'economic freedom will necessarily lead to freedom in other aspects of life'.³⁸

Socialists adopted an understanding, and acceptance, of capitalism as something that governments could successfully manage and plan.³⁹ Economic growth was not generated by the virtues of the free market, but the result of good and sensible policy and it could be used by the state to promote all kinds of social objectives. As these ideas gained ground in governments on which also the Socialists left increasingly their mark, governments increased the scope of their action even further and the 'welfare state' became ever more of an objective that Christian Democrats and Socialists had in common.⁴⁰ Cultural programmes, expansion of education (and in particular, greater accessibility of higher education), subsidies for community activities, family support and childcare, medical care, subsidized public transport: such programmes became reality across the continent. And just as the people's parties claimed to represent everyone, so the programmes they initiated benefited most people too. Even in consistently Social democratic Sweden, where the SAP governed without interruption, the programmes were of a universalist type and benefited most of all the middle classes—rather than the working class.⁴¹

The belief that capitalism could and should be planned became ever more pronounced in the 1960s. When the PSI joined forces with the DC in government in 1963, it did not push for nationalizations other than that of the electrical energy sector. Instead, it spurred efforts in the field of planning, visible in the establishment of the National Commission of Economic Planning (or 'Programming' as they called it). This commission made concrete five-year plans with programmes for specific regions, increased powers for public companies, and broadened the scope of government action by also targeting urban planning and public housing.⁴² Similarly, it was only after the SPD entered into a government coalition with the CDU in 1966 that Germany really embraced Keynesian economics. A year after the coalition was forged, the government adopted the 'Law on the stabilization of the economy and the promotion of economic growth'. The law conveyed an unrelenting trust in the possibilities of the government to take measures that 'will help to stabilize prices, maintain a high level of employment . . . accompanied by steady and adequate economic growth'. In equally reassuring terms, the SPD-minister for the Economy, Karl Schiller, on the radio tried to calm Germans when the first postwar recession announced itself in 1967. He assured

³⁸ H. Deist, *Wirtschaft von Morgen. Beiträge zur Wirtschaftspolitik der SPD* (Berlin/Hannover: Dietz Verlag, 1959), 15.

³⁹ Mudge, *Leftism Reinvented*, ch. 4.

⁴⁰ I. de Haan, 'The Western European Welfare State beyond Christian and Social Democrat Ideology', in D. Stone, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 299–318.

⁴¹ Esping-Andersen, 'The Making of a Social Democratic Welfare State', 47.

⁴² Manin Carabba, *Un Ventennio di programmazione 1954–1974* (Bari: Laterza, 1974), 31–45.

them that the government 'sees its most important economic policy task as paving the way for a new economic upswing as soon as possible', by presenting 'an economic and financial policy programme through which the economy can once again be stimulated to new action without endangering price stability'. This plan would then be 'oriented equally toward the two goals of growth and stability. Stability and growth must rank equally as indicators in a well-balanced economic policy.'⁴³

Radical-cum-Socialist politician and former prime minister Pierre Mèndes-France outlined a similar conviction that the economy, and economic growth and unemployment, could, be planned and managed in his classic essay *La République Moderne*. Here, he stated that 'everyone recognizes today that the state is responsible for economic development, that it is its task to combat crises and unemployment, to stimulate and coordinate efforts to grow and promote common progress'. And just like Schiller, also he connected the objective of economic growth to social stability and peace. Because, as he argued, 'in one hundred years from now, historians will not judge us on the affairs which dominate newspaper headlines . . . but to the conditions of existence, the creation of bigger possibilities The value of the social and political system depends on the rhythm of growth and the usage of the surplus of production to guarantee a more just division of material wealth.'⁴⁴

Together, the repudiation of Marxism, the embracing of parliamentary democracy as an end, the praising of Keynesian planning, and the diversification of their social base radically altered the character of Socialist parties. Socialist identity had ever since their founding been built on their reputation as outsiders who challenged the status quo. Now they built a new identity centred on consensus and compromise rather than polarization and confrontation. Along with it came their cheering of government responsibility. In a cynical way, one could argue that in countries like Austria, Belgium, and especially Italy, the Socialists quickly adopted, and emulated, the clientelistic practices of their Christian Democrat coalition partners.⁴⁵ They increasingly asked for a slice of the public sector appointments, control over public companies, and a say over the direction of slushes of government money that went from capital to periphery. But there was more to it than mere hunger for power: they saw their democratic function in radically different terms than before, namely as parties that by governing contributed to the overarching aim of stabilizing democracy. This meant that in the 1960s European democracies had taken on a remarkably stable and consensual tone because, after the Christian Democrats, now the Socialists too conceived of themselves as people's parties.

⁴³ K. Schiller, *Wirtschaftsminister Karl Schiller über die konzertierte Aktion 9. Januar 1967*, found on https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/print_document.cfm?document_id=928.

⁴⁴ P. Mèndes France, *La République Moderne. Propositions* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 109.

⁴⁵ L. Musella, *Clientelismo. Tradizione e trasformazione della politica italiana 1975-1992* (Naples: Guida, 2000).

Consensus, Collaboration, Compromise

Democracy as ‘Super-ideology’ in the 1960s

In the September days of 1963, leading politicians of the DC and prominent academics sympathetic to the party gathered in San Pellegrino, a spa on the foothills of the Alps. The picturesque hilltop town was the perfect retreat to rethink the remarkable transformation of Italian politics over the past two decades. Outside in the autumn sun politicians struck deals, chatted away with journalists, and enjoyed the spectacular mountain views. Inside, in austere rooms with high ceilings and closed curtains, grey men in grey suits in the audience listened to an endless series of speeches of other grey men in grey suits on stage. Some seemed concerned about the challenges of the time, such as the disruptive social consequences of rapid economic growth, or the decline of religious values. Yet they unanimously applauded Italy’s remarkable renaissance. Less than two decades before, the country was an impoverished autarkic dictatorship ruined by war, and a pariah of the international community. Now, it was a democratic industrial powerhouse witnessing almost double-digit annual GDP-growth and spearheading an unprecedented level of European political and economic integration.

The protagonists of this rebirth were precisely those who had been outsiders of Italian politics from the days of Italian unification in the nineteenth century right until those of Mussolini: political parties, and most of all the DC. The DC was born in 1942 as a small resistance force, the heir of the PPI, spokesperson of previously politically marginalized Italian political Catholics. Now not a single major decision could be taken without its opinion, or, rather, the different opinions of its various currents, being taken into consideration. Some attendees at San Pellegrino questioned whether the DC could stay true to its roots and fill its supporters with the same kind of enthusiasm as before. But others argued that precisely its identity as a governing party stabilized the democratic regime. This eagerness to govern, whatever the price, has often been depicted as an evil trait of power-hungry Christian-democrat politicians, both in Italy and beyond. But their emphasis on providing stable government and cooling down the heated ideological conflicts that had deeply divided Europeans was essential for the

stabilization of democracy.¹ As a leading politician at the party conference of the CDU concluded already in 1952, parties only had a right to exist:

if they really feel they are a party for everyone and are prepared to fulfil the tasks that follow from their political existence. This is only possible, ladies and gentlemen, when in the party life of Germany, the word 'responsibility' is written in capital letters, responsibility for that parties together see themselves obliged to act for the general good rather than their own closed community.²

By the 1960s, Socialists also adopted this credo passionately. The transformation from oppositional class parties into people's parties was not merely a matter of becoming more electable, by opportunistically singing praise to the virtues of capitalism or embracing the reality of NATO. They ventured onto terrain that had for many Socialists always been off-limits: re-inventing socialism as a programme for government in a capitalist setting. Sometimes, this endorsement of government came almost naturally, especially to parties that were already accustomed to it. The Belgian Socialists simply copied Adenauer's election cry 'no experiments' by claiming that the country should avoid a leap in the dark by allowing the Socialist prime minister to continue to govern ('geen avonturen, laat Van Acker doorbesturen'). But also the Socialist parties that had always prided themselves on their confrontational stance made this transformation rather easily. By the time the PSI and SPD joined the government, they had governed for merely three (PSI) or four years (SPD) since their founding in the late 1800s. But the spirit of opposition was easily put behind. The SPD's election campaign manifesto of '65 was simply called 'Yes to the SPD, Yes to Germany', and Brandt told comrades at the election congress that 'contemporary German politics must be the conscious expression of the people, should be made from the centre . . . We social democrats wage our election campaign not against one thing or another [but] we have a programme that benefits Germany and the entire German people'.³ The PSI hosted a special congress on the theme of government responsibility, where claims that the party 'should not act as the political expression of the working class, but as a force that takes decisions' were met with approval.⁴ Similarly, the new SPÖ-leader Bruno Kreisky, on becoming Austria's Chancellor, stated that 'the timidity that sometimes gripped Social Democratic parties when they were confronted

¹ DC, *Partiti e Democrazia. Atti del III Convegno Nazionale di Studio della Democrazia Cristiana. San Pellegrino 13-16 settembre 1963* (Rome: Edizione Cinque Lune, 1964).

² Intervention of Hermann Ludwig Ehlers at the CDU, *Zweiter Parteitag der Christlich-Demokratischen Union Deutschlands. Karlsruhe 18-21 Oktober 1951* (Bonn: CDU, 1951), 10-11.

³ W. Brandt, 'Ja zur SPD, Ja zu Deutschland. Rede des Vorsitzenden der SPD, Brandt, auf dem Wahlkongress beim Deutschlandtreffen der SPD in Dortmund, 14. August 1965', in W. Brandt, *Auf dem Weg nach vorn*, 336-43: 336.

⁴ Intervention of Antonio Landolfi at PSI, *Costituente Aperta. Le nuove frontiere del socialismo in Italia* (Florence: Vallecchi editore, 1966), 64.

with government responsibility' was a thing of the past. 'Today', he added, 'I believe, Social democratic parties are everywhere filled with a new courage to take responsibility'.⁵

In the 1960s, democracy in Europe took on a consensual tone in which governing (and the compromises that came with it) preceded over ideological debate. The plea of thinkers like Alf Ross to forego of political conflict had been heard and taken to heart. Party leaders (and, in their wake, most of their followers) converged on a set of shared values, namely those of collaboration, consensus, and compromise—in the context of parliamentary democracy and government planning of a capitalist economy. The trauma of the Interwar era continued to motivate them to cherish these values. Indeed, as the prominent Swedish political scientist and publisher Hebert Tingsten observed, it was 'the fear of economic and political crises of the sort which damaged popular government in the interwar period' which hammered down the belief that 'everyone must consciously work toward the limitation of conflicts in different areas'. Ideology, in the sense of political beliefs that strived for a complete reset of societal and political norms, had become redundant for parties. Instead, governing was all important. Echoing Ross twenty years later, Tingsten observed that parties had completely changed their role: 'The stress on shared values means that ideologies are so reduced in significance that one can speak of a development from politics to administration'.⁶

The postwar party-state was not merely a regime in which parties dominated elections, parliaments, and governments—as it had been after the First World War. It was also not merely a regime in which the function of parties was to primarily articulate and represent the interests and opinions of their followers. The harsh lessons learned in the 1920s and 1930s taught them that this was not enough and that it could even destabilize democracy. Rather, the party-state should be a regime in which parties actively governed democracy by means of their control over the state and important social relations—and did so together harmoniously. If there was one country that illustrates how this new essence of party government benefited the stabilization of democracy, it was Austria. Determined to avoid the abyss of open warfare on the streets of Vienna, the ÖVP and SPÖ moved from competition to collaboration. Their Grand Coalition lasted from 1945 to 1966 and was not merely a political alliance. It extended to the social and economic spheres, where they actively and successfully governed previously tense relationships. And it continued to function this way also when

⁵ B. Kreisky, *Vom Heute ins Morgen. Rede vor dem Villacher Parteitag 1972 der SPÖ* (Vienna: SPÖ, 1972), 7.

⁶ Tingsten, *The Problem of Democracy*, 193–4.

one of the major parties ended in opposition, as was the case, first, briefly, for the Socialists, and then fourteen years for the ÖVP.⁷

The blueprint for this type of party government was laid early. Throughout 1946 and 1947, Austria faced economic and social problems much like those in the aftermath of the First World War—and feared similar disastrous political consequences. While inflation soared and workers frequently resorted to strikes and lockouts, the price of agricultural products remained behind, and farmers squeezed food supplies into the cities in response. This toxic dynamic threatened to pit three groups against each other that had fought harshly in the 1920s: workers demanding higher wages to keep up with inflation, employers demanding higher productivity (and an end to the strikes), and farmers demanding higher prices. But unlike before, the principle of confrontation was replaced with collaboration. The three main interest groups, the so-called Chambers of Labour, Agriculture, and Trade, joined by the now unified labour union and the government, worked out a wage-price deal that settled the prices of essential goods and services and adjusted wages accordingly. This not only curbed inflation but also laid the basis of the much-praised social partnership between these Chambers that lasted for decades.

On the surface, the Austrian social partnership was a voluntary agreement among these interest groups. The three Chambers bargained collectively about wages and prices, after which an economic advisory commission discussed the budgetary consequences. Only then was parliament involved to make necessary legislation. As such, the social partnership appeared to have shifted power away from politicians. But, in fact, it was an economic extension of the lasting political alliance between Socialists and Christian Democrats.⁸ These parties were firmly in control. The basis of the diffusion of tensions was a series of secret Coalition Agreements in which the SPÖ and ÖVP agreed that any major decision would henceforward require the consent of both parties. But there was more. Up until the 1970s, over half of the MPs of the SPÖ and ÖVP were simultaneously members of one of the three Chambers. And this did not just count for backbenchers. Joseph Figl, who succeeded Renner as first ÖVP-Chancellor after the War, was a high-ranking official in the Chamber of Agriculture. His successor Julius Raab presided over the Chamber of Trade. And Raab's Socialist minister of Social Affairs was a prominent member of the Chamber of Labour, as well as the vice president of the labour union (setting a tradition to combine these functions that continued for decades).

⁷ The Austrian social partnership is dealt with by O. Ratkolb, *The Paradoxical Republic: Austria 1945–2000* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2021) and G. Bischof and A. Pelinka, eds, *Austro-Corporatism. Past, Present, Future* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1996).

⁸ H. P. Secher, 'Representative Democracy or "Chamber State": The Ambiguous Role of Interest Groups in Austrian Politics', *Western Political Quarterly* 13.4 (1960), 890–909.

In this way, the SPÖ and ÖVP tightly controlled the social partnership.⁹ It was more than a tactical understanding and cynic division of influence: their shared battle for low inflation, fair income distribution, full employment, and economic growth was key to deeply craved political stability. Austria's social partnership was far-reaching, but the same principle of indirect party administration of the economy and social relations applied elsewhere. The distinction between parties, social partners, local elites, MPs, and government agencies became blurred in the intention to ease previously polarized relationships. The shared concern of leading politicians was to quash any social unrest before it could get sparked.

The fear of recurrence of the kind of contestations that characterized pre-war Europe ran deep. The Italian Christian Democrats, for instance, were from the start worried about the return of the kind of peasant protests that had since the nineteenth century threatened Italian administrations. These worries were sparked by a series of protest and land occupations in southern Italy at the end of the War. Of particular concern to the DC were millions of small independent farmers who always ran the risk of social demotion, being squeezed between large landowners and day labourers. Their support was essential for the Christian Democrat party and the viability of the democratic regime at large. De Gasperi therefore immediately supported the efforts of his fellow Christian Democrat Paolo Bonomi in 1944 and 1945 to establish the *Coldiretti*, a syndicate for small independent farmers.¹⁰ Formally, the *Coldiretti* was an independent collective, providing agricultural tools and insurance for its members and lobbying for their interests in parliament. But in practice, there was 'an iron bond of belonging' between the DC, *Coldiretti*, and the ministry of Agriculture.¹¹ De Gasperi decided to support it financially and logistically from the start, concerned as he was about the possible electoral consequences of missing the support of these groups. Dozens of *Coldiretti* leaders were also DC-members of parliament: fifty-two won a seat in the elections of 1958.¹² One of them was Bonomi himself, who was an MP from 1946 until 1983 and had a reputation for carrying the government's agricultural policies in his pocket—as was visible in several agricultural and land reforms in the late 1940s and early 1950s that benefited his supporters. Local government officials that executed these reforms and launched projects in the countryside in turn made use of the *Coldiretti* to support their policies. The overlap between party, government, and syndicate played into the hands of the DC.¹³ But it was in the view of the Christian Democrats crucial to keep voters away from the Communists and stabilize the fragile rural basis of the democratic regime.

⁹ R. Luther and W.C. Müller eds., *Politics in Austria: Still a Case of Consociationalism* (London: Routledge, 2014), esp. ch. 3.

¹⁰ E. Bernardi, *La Coldiretti e la storia d'Italia* (Rome: Donzelli, 2020), 13–31.

¹¹ Bernardi, *La Coldiretti*, 76. ¹² Bernardi, *La Coldiretti*, 161.

¹³ P. Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy. Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London: Penguin Press, 2003), ch. 4 and 5.

Also elsewhere, party elites actively managed potentially contentious issues to prevent them from polarizing fragile social relations. In Belgium, for instance, the long-simmering issue of financial support for Catholic primary and secondary education became a hotly contested topic again in the mid-1950s.¹⁴ It threatened to pit Socialists and Catholics once again against each other and culminated in massive demonstrations on the streets. But instead of letting this issue continue to put people and parties against each other publicly the main parties now decided to instal an intra-party National School Commission that worked out a compromise behind the scenes. This compromise was discussed (and approved) first on different party congresses and only then debated (and rubber-stamped) by the parties' MPs. This blueprint to solve contentious issues by party elites was so successful that it was applied too in agreements that settled the relationship between the two linguistic groups in the country.

Potentially contentious legislation in postwar Europe was therefore almost always the result of agreement among the main parties. In this sense, party leaders incorporated Ross's lesson that democracy itself would stand to lose if it was built on a 'winner takes all' principle. It could only thrive if it was supported by cross-party agreement in which everyone got a share. And as now Socialists and Christian Democrats were both government parties, they required a state apparatus that supported and executed their decisions loyally. Important positions in the bureaucracy and in (semi-)state institutions were brought under party control with the aim of fostering consensus, stability, and social peace.

Belgium, Italy, and Austria had a particularly strong reputation for this kind of patronage, where party politicians carved up the public sector among loyalists and their local clientele. From the street cleaners in Naples's bloating communal services to media barons in Brussels: parties nailed their colours firmly to the mast. Austria's so-called *Proporzdemokratie* was a 'party-state to the extreme': the Socialists and Christian Democrats divided every major position in media, ministries, and management of banks for the sake of stability.¹⁵ Pretty much the same counted for Belgium's *particratie*, or 'partyocracy', where patronage was a preferred instrument of government parties to buy off regional and linguistic tensions.¹⁶ Not just in the bureaucracy but even at schools, new positions and promotions were subject to party patronage. Moreover, parties controlled the public media to such an extent that the media minister could intervene in all programmes, including live news broadcasting (which he did). After a revision of the media law to prevent such interventions, the Catholics, Socialists, and Liberals in a secret agreement (akin to their settling of the school question) divided the

¹⁴ L. Huyse, *De gewapende vrede. Politiek in België na 1945* (Leuven: Kritak, 1987), ch. 3.

¹⁵ A. Pelinka, *Austria. Out of the Shadow of the Past* (London: Routledge, 1998), 73–7.

¹⁶ K. Van Nieuwenhuysse, S. Fiers, and F. Verleden, 'De macht van partijen in België sinds 1981: *particratie revisited*', *Res Publica* 60.4 (2018), 302–17.

control organs of radio and television. Similarly, in Italy, the three television channels of the RAI were the domain of the DC, PSI, and PCI respectively. It reflected how the DC quickly used their influence over the bureaucracy and public companies to assure support of followers and voters. This was not only noted by opponents (who soon, in any case, emulated the DC's ways). Even a regional DC-secretary noted that citizens 'in our part of the world—and not merely in general—do not distinguish between the party and the government when assessing the achievements of the DC'.¹⁷ Also Sturzo, by then an aged Senator, argued in a series of articles that the distinction between party, government, and state seemed almost to disappear completely in Italy. The country saw an 'excess' of the power of parties which were not 'self-limiting' and suffocated public life.¹⁸

However, this type of party government was certainly not limited to these three countries. In Germany, partly state-owned car company *Volkswagen* came under scrutiny for paying money into the pockets of the CDU—which allegedly responded with favourable legislation. The SPD called it a 'clear case of political corruption'.¹⁹ So also here, the boundaries between (semi-)public companies, the government, and the party seemed blurry. Critics referred to Germany regularly as a *CDU-Staat* to denote that the leading party dominated the entire state apparatus (even though this did not change much after the SPD came to power).²⁰ In response to the allegedly too-SPD-friendly first and only public television channel, the CDU-government launched a second public television channel in 1960. This was so uncritical of the Christian Democrats that it was soon mockingly labelled *Adenauer-TV*. In France, De Gaulle had established the National School of Administration to promote meritocracy and prevent party influence over the bureaucracy. But after he returned to power in 1958 this intention did not count for much. A scholar who conducted the first major study of French bureaucracy concluded that 'the UNR quickly has assured itself of control over most of the institutions in the public and semi-public sectors and, even at the local level... insofar as bureaucracy is concerned, the UNR... appears to be moving toward enlisting the bureaucracy at its service'.²¹

Political parties did not seem to be concerned too much about the ethical side of all this. Rather, they saw patronage as a means not just to garner support (40 per

¹⁷ Cited with Forlenza, 'A Party for the *Mezzogiorno*', 336.

¹⁸ L. Sturzo, 'Democrazia e partitocrazia' (1954), in L. Sturzo, *Opere Omnia di Luigi Sturzo. Seconda Serie. Saggi-Discorsi-Articoli*, Vol. 13: *Politica di questi anni. Consensi e critiche (1954-1956)* (Rome: Edizione Cinque Lune, 1966), 30-5. See also L. Musella, *Il Potere della Politica. Partiti e Stato in Italia (1945-2015)* (Rome: Carocci, 2015).

¹⁹ SPD, *Die Finanzierung des Wahlkampfes 1957. Eine Untersuchung über die Abhängigkeit politischer Parteien von wirtschaftlichen Machtgruppen* (Bonn: SPD, 1957), 8.

²⁰ K. von Beyme, *Die politische Klasse im Parteienstaat* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 63-9.

²¹ E. N. Suleiman, *Politics, Power, and Bureaucracy in France. The Administrative Elite* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 360.

cent of ÖVP-members admitted that ‘patronage’ was the reason they joined the party),²² and thus to buttress the consensus on which the postwar settlement hinged. Precisely because parties played such a central role in the execution of government policy, it was essential that important state institutions and social organizations were staffed by sympathizers. In Germany, even appointees for the nominally neutral and prestigious institutions such as the Federal Constitutional Court and the Central Bank were almost always persons close to, or open members of, the CDU and SPD. Half of the direction members of the Central Bank consistently belonged to the CDU, four out of ten were close to the SPD. The same counted for the Federal Constitutional Court. Members of the two branches of the Court were elected by a parliamentary commission which required a two-thirds majority for any candidate. This required collaboration between CDU and SPD and led to a division of influence between them to such an extent that observers talked about a ‘red’ and a ‘black’ branch of the Court, to reflect that the judges carried party membership cards.²³ Initially, they also agreed that a third of new members should be without party affiliation, but over the course of the years the number of independents quickly dwindled close to zero.

Precisely because power was diffused rather than concentrated, postwar democracy required collaboration and coordination. And this, in turn, meant that the system could only function by virtue of the consensus among Socialists and Christian Democrats. By the early 1960s, there existed no longer any major foreign policy or economic disagreements between them, nor did they differ fundamentally on other previously tormenting issues such as religious influence over education.²⁴ Instead, Tingsten rightly noted that ‘democracy has become a super-ideology which all accept, the bulwark of the nation’. This, in his view, enabled ‘Western democracies to be more stable and more secure than earlier’.²⁵ Capturing the spirit of the age, Ludwig Erhard, who finally succeeded Adenauer as Chancellor in 1963, stressed that democracy ‘depends on the cooperation of all’. It took form in what he called a ‘cooperative society’ in which no longer different groups and classes with opposing goals existed, but cooperation among them for the general interest had become the natural situation. And this democracy in a new key also required ‘new impulses from our political parties’. These no longer represented particular groups but were now considered with the well-being of all.

²² P. Ullram, F. Plasser, and W. C. Müller, ‘Mitglieder- und Wählerstruktur’, in Kriechbaumer and Schausberger, eds, *Volkspartei*, 163–200: 191.

²³ U. Wagschal, ‘Der Parteienstaat der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Parteipolitische Zusammensetzung seiner Schlüsselinstitutionen’, *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 32.4 (2001), 861–86.

²⁴ Corduener, ‘Disconnect Romanticism from Politics’.

²⁵ Tingsten, *The Problem of Democracy*, 195.

Necessarily, Erhard stated, 'we require a new kind of specialist, namely a specialist for the general interest'.²⁶

Some observers deplored the 'end of ideology' as this trend was referred to increasingly (gaining prominence after the Congress of Cultural Freedom in Milan in 1955, which featured Daniel Bell and Raymond Aron).²⁷ Tingsten, for one, feared that now that articulating political demands had become the domain of party bureaucrats rather than ordinary citizens, these citizens might lose interest in public affairs all together: 'how we can obtain a personal involvement of citizens without abandoning the security and the consensus on values among the public?', he asked. But others, and especially those who had stood in the eye of the storm that devastated the democracies of the 1920s and 1930s, cheered the end of political conflict and the arrival of democracy as a kind of 'super ideology'. Party leaders were continuously aware that the lessons learned in the Interwar era should not be forgotten. Indeed, the memory of dictatorship, war, and occupation continued to echo as a warning of what political polarization could lead to—a warning that politicians felt they could never afford to leave unheeded.

Seen from this perspective, the end of ideology was definitely a good thing. Responding to concerns whether the CDU was perhaps becoming too big for German democracy, leading CDU-members retorted self-consciously that 'the Weimar republic collapsed not in the last place because the SPD did not manage to unite all sections of our people in a large people's party. If there had been a democratic party with the strength and stability of the Union . . . then our people would have been spared the terrible time between 1933 and 1945'.²⁸ The new ÖVP-Chancellor Alfons Gorbach, presenting his ÖVP-SPÖ-government to parliament in 1961—in front of a 165-seat parliament where he could count on all but eight votes—recalled the strife in Austria's First Republic, when 'patriots were no democrats, and democrats were no patriots' and argued how the Austrian Civil War taught that democracy could only flourish in an 'atmosphere of social peace'. Therefore it was important that the Socialists and Christian Democrats 'although separated by different world views, feel united by their shared dedication to common values and objectives'. Now 'democrats were finally patriots' and the other way around.²⁹ And when the PSI and the DC formed their government coalition, the first of its kind in peacetime Italian history, Nenni remarked that 'for

²⁶ L. Erhard, 'Formierte Gesellschaft. Rede vor dem 13. Bundesparteitag der CDU' (1965), in L. Erhard, *Gedanken aus fünf Jahrzehnten. Reden und Schriften* (Munich: Econ, 1990), 915–27: 916–17.

²⁷ G. Scott-Smith, 'The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the End of Ideology and the 1955 Milan Conference: "Defining the Parameters of Discourse"', *Journal of Contemporary History* 37.3 (2002), 437–55.

²⁸ Intervention of Bruno Heck at CDU, 6. *Bundesparteitag der CDU, 26–29 April 1956, Stuttgart* (Bonn: CDU, 1956), 106.

²⁹ Declaration of Alfons Gorbach, at 64. Sitzung des Nationalrates der Republik Österreich. IX. Gesetzgebungsperiode. Mittwoch, 19 April 1961, 2682, 2689. Found on https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/IX/NRSITZ/NRSITZ_00064/imfname_156760.pdf.

the pre-fascist and fascist political class, socialism was always a problem to be solved by the police, of handcuffs and of prison . . . today the Socialist party has an ally and this, to me, seems of the uttermost democratic importance'.³⁰ Moro echoed him by claiming that the 'parallel convergence' of DC and PSI was exactly what the country needed to move towards an 'advanced democracy' that was built on inclusion rather than exclusion.

The 'people's party' seemed the adequate answer to the political polarization and instability of the first decades of the twentieth century. This did not go unnoticed by the postwar generation of party scholars. Just as in the 1920s observers were struck by the institutional reforms that ushered in the age of the party-state, political thinkers were now fascinated by remarkable transformation of parties themselves. They saw parties ever less as social organizations in which like-minded citizens gathered, and ever more as institutions that were semi-part of the state apparatus. Parties underwent a *trasformazione pubblicistica* as the prominent Italian legal scholar and future Constitutional Court judge Costantino Mortati observed a 'transformation' from partisan to public institutions.³¹

Most famously, this transformation of parties was captured by the German-émigré party scholar Otto Kirchheimer. Kirchheimer was, like many of his contemporaries, struck by the quick cooling down of the ideological heat that had set ablaze European politics ever since the end of the First World War. In contrast to the parades, street demonstrations, and barricades of the first decades of the century, politics in his eyes now took place in a rather muted, perhaps even dull, atmosphere. This was because political parties were ever less spokespersons of certain clearly defined groups, and ever more aimed to represent the people as a whole.³² Writing just a few years after Duverger had declared the triumph of the mass party, Kirchheimer considered the trend towards what he called a 'catch-all party' 'inevitable' and considered the mass party obsolete. Parties were now all driven by their search for as many votes as possible, which is why they moderated their views: the 'catch-all party' was a 'competitive phenomenon'. Moreover, 'the opinion-expressing and the governmental business [have merged] in the same political parties', with which Kirchheimer meant that governing, rather than mobilizing their supporters, became much more important to parties.³³

The question was, of course, for party scholars just as for politicians, how to value this trend. Kirchheimer nostalgically longed for the age of mass party politics in which he had grown up and feared that citizens would not feel

³⁰ Nenni, 'Il governo Fanfani di Centro-Sinistra', 197-8.

³¹ C. Mortati, 'Concetto e funzione dei partiti politici', *Quaderni di ricerca*, 11, 4/5 (n.y.), 11. See also M. Fioravanti, *Costituzione e popolo sovrano. La Costituzione italiana nella storia del costituzionalismo moderno* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998), 73-4.

³² A. Krouwel, 'Otto Kirchheimer and the Catch-All Party', *West European Politics* 26.2 (2003), 23-40.

³³ Kirchheimer, 'The Transformation of the Western European Party System', 358-9.

represented by the 'remote, quasi-official and alien structure' that the postwar parties increasingly had. But he was countered by many who viewed the form of governed party democracy that became dominant in postwar Europe as the epitome of good and legitimate government. The most prominent advocate of this view was Gerhard Leibholz, an influential German academic who held the presidency of the German Constitutional Court in the 1950s and 1960s. Just like Mortati, Leibholz emphasized that parties were no longer simply social organizations, but 'part of the structure of the state'.³⁴ If parties indeed dominated the postwar system completely, this was only for the better. Precisely because they were now so firmly rooted in the state's institutions, they bridged people and government in a way that would have been unthinkable before and that the mass party would never have been able to accomplish. To those who objected to the party mould in which democracy was crafted and endorsed more direct, rather than managed, forms of political participation, Leibholz retorted that 'there is no difference between the people and parties' and that the modern party-state 'is a surrogate of direct democracy'. Parties are the 'megaphone' of the people, and without them, the people would not be able to express itself at all. One prominent sociologist and contemporary of Leibholz even distinguished three categories of citizens in modern democracies to legitimize party dominance. There were 'state citizens', who simply enjoyed their individual freedoms without becoming actively involved in politics, 'active citizens', who made use of their right to vote, and the most elevated category, 'party citizens', who by the virtue of their party membership enjoyed (and deserved) most political influence. For him, parties were the cornerstone of any modern democratic state. Indeed, while early modern states had 'royal costumes, songs, and flags' to integrate the citizen in the state, 'the most important means to integrate people in modern states is the party'.³⁵

In party scholarship, this understanding of the people's party as a party model that stabilized democracy by providing dedicating itself to government gradually replaced the appraisal of the 'mass party' or 'integration party' that was characterized most of all by its social function—one that thinkers like Neumann and Duverger had seen between the 1920s and early 1950s. Also in electoral terms, the model of the people's party reigned supreme. The Gaullist party secured a solid victory in every election since the establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958. The two Austrian people's parties captured consistently 90 per cent of the vote in parliamentary elections, slightly more than the Belgian Socialist and Christian

³⁴ G. Leibholz, *Der Strukturwandel der modernen Demokratie. Vortrag gehalten in der Juristischen Studiengesellschaft in Karlsruhe am. 30 April 1952* (Karlsruhe: Verlag C. F. Müller, 1952), 16; G. Leibholz, 'Volk und Partei im neuen deutschen Verfassungsrecht' (1950), in G. Leibholz, *Strukturwandel der modernen Demokratie* (Stuttgart: Verlag C. F. Müller, 1958), 71–7: 72. See on the overlap between the views of Leibholz and Mortati also P. Corduener, 'Gerhard Leibholz, Costantino Mortati and the ideological roots of postwar party democracy in Germany and Italy', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 26.1 (2021), 101–119.

³⁵ F. A. Freiherr von der Heydte, *Soziologie der deutschen Parteien* (Munich: Isar Verlag, 1955), 37, 45.

Social Party pooled together there. In the more fragmented Italian political landscape, the DC still took steadily four out of ten votes, while the PSI held on to about 15 per cent. And in Germany, eight out of ten people voted for either the CDU or the SPD—together with a high electoral threshold this was enough to make the Liberals the only other force that remained represented in parliament in the 1960s.

However, precisely at the moment that the people's party as an ideal, electoral machine and base of governing power seemed uncontested, doubts started to surface about the people's party model on which postwar democracy was built. The old Adenauer adage that 'all participation goes through the parties' lost appeal as new forms of participation emerged. And it was no coincidence that these concerns were first addressed in Germany, where some viewed the electoral hegemony of the SPD and CDU and their Grand Coalition not as a sign of democratic stability but as something that underlined the country's democratic deficit. Without a genuine parliamentary opposition, an 'extra-parliamentary opposition' was necessary to contest the government and save democracy. When the CDU-SPD government adopted controversial laws that gave the state extensive powers to act in case of national emergencies, so-called 'emergency laws', the protesters outside parliament declared the 'emergency of democracy'. Their movement quickly swelled to thousands of activists across the country, most of all in universities which were swarmed by tens of thousands of students of the postwar baby boom generation.³⁶ Their protests were further boosted by the fatal shooting of a young (and first-time) protestor in West Berlin in 1967.

The protests in Germany were about much more than the emergency laws alone. They were about the question whether democracy could mean more than consensus and stability organized by people's parties who seemed to be devoted most of all to good 'administration'. For a new generation, this understanding of democracy did not have much appeal. For them, democracy should be about continuous participation and involvement of ordinary citizens. It should not be confined to the ballot booth or to party conferences and meetings and certainly not be limited to the corridors of government power. If democracy was about participation in decision-making, it was everywhere, from the factory to schools and universities and even in the family.³⁷ The idea that the people's party ought to be open to everyone started to clash with the idea that not everyone felt welcome

³⁶ N. Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany. A Social History of Dissent and Democracy* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003).

³⁷ P. Gassert, 'Narratives of Democratization. 1968 in Postwar Europe', in M. Kinke and J. Scharloth, eds, *1968 in Europe. A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 307–24.

inside their ranks. This counted for the new generation of students and activists inside parties (the SPD broke ties with the Socialist Student Union that it viewed as too radical already in the early 1960s),³⁸ but also for women, who had been targeted as voters, but who had often remained on the margins of party life when it came to real influence on decision-making. This hurt the people's parties in their claim to represent 'the entire people in all its categories', as the DC had phrased it back in 1945.

Party leaders had to balance the demands and interests of new groups belonging to a more affluent and secular middle class with those of their original supporters. This led to introspection. The ÖVP-leader and Chancellor Jozef Klaus wrote a working paper in 1967 in which he called for 'a livelier democracy', more ideological debate, end to practices of patronage, and more direct involvement of citizens in political affairs. 'Parties and the state should be strictly separate because the principle of democracy deserves to have priority in every aspect', he warned.³⁹ The PSI's organization was in the words of one militant, made 'for the politics of class opposition, inspired on democratic centralism'. But this had become 'anachronistic thanks to the collaboration with other forces' (as the DC was referred to).⁴⁰ Similarly, the SPD summoned all regional and national party leaders to Bonn to discuss how its identity as a people's party that it had affirmed in Godesberg affected its organization. It concluded that 'our regional party organisations must be formed in such a way that the Social Democrats can communicate with all sections of the population'.⁴¹ Indeed, as Brandt put it: 'One cannot affirm the transformation of the SPD into a people's party and at the same time expect that in its actions, structure, sociology and leaderships remains that of a traditional workers' party'.⁴²

So, towards the end of the 1960s, while the model of the people's party, built on the dual ability to represent and govern, seemingly still reigned supreme, cracks started to appear on its surface. This opened major questions: Could the Christian Democrats and Social democrats manage to stay close to their roots and continue to inspire their followers while also attracting new ones? Could they somehow accommodate the growing demands to conceive of democracy in new ways, with more room for civic participation inside but also outside party politics? Could they find ways to connect to citizens as Catholic and working-class identities

³⁸ T. P. Fichter and S. Lönnendonker, *Kleine Geschichte des SDS. Der Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund von Helmut Schmid bis Rudi Dutschke* (Essen: Klartext, 2007).

³⁹ J. Klaus, 'Arbeitspapier des Bundeskanzlers Klaus, April 1966', in A. Pelinka, ed., *Demokratie und Verfassung in Österreich* (Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1971), 331–41: 332–4.

⁴⁰ Tamburrano, *Per un partito socialista moderno*, 21.

⁴¹ H. Wehner, 'Die Arbeiterfrage im Programm der SPD. Rede vor Betriebsfunktionären über das Godesberger Parteiprogramm der SPD, 24 November 1959', in H. Wehner, *Wandel und Bewährung. Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften 1930–1975* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1976), 219–31: 223.

⁴² W. Brandt, 'Rechenschaftsbericht der SPD von Willy Brandt', in *Parteitag der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands vom 17. bis 21. März in Nürnberg 1968. Protokoll der Verhandlungen* (Bonn: Vorstand der SPD, 1968), 77–113: 106.

slowly became less profound? And could the people's parties continue to act as social movements of and for like-minded citizens while they devoted so much of their energy to taking on government responsibility? Such questions were ever more present on the mind of party elites. And they had been prefigured by one of the participants in the San Pellegrino conference of the DC, who had asked the participants perhaps the most essential question for the coming decade: 'How should parties balance their aims to participate intimately in the life of the democratic state without alienating or changing the way they are inspired by the people?'⁴³

⁴³ P. E. Taviani, 'Partiti e Democrazia nell'attuale esperienza politica', in DC, *Partiti e Democrazia*, 13–62: 15.

PART III

THE FALL OF THE PEOPLE'S
PARTIES AND THE CRISIS OF THE
POSTWAR MODEL OF
DEMOCRACY, 1968–2000

The Challenge of 1968 and the Aim to Reaffirm the Primacy of the People's Parties

The Social democrat leaders Olof Palme, Bruno Kreisky, and Willy Brandt came to power around the turn of the 1970s by promising voters a continued expansion of postwar prosperity. They started an exchange of letters on how social democracy could fulfil this promise in the coming decade. But while their conversation started off on an optimistic note, worries about the state of the economy, the environment, and even that of democracy soon seeped in. They realized that the 1973 Oil Crisis was not a temporary setback, but the end of an era, the terminus of the postwar boom. Brandt wrote that 'major difficulties now lie ahead' and that 'industrial nations will have to re-invent themselves'. Palme observed that 'an apolitical tendency is visible, with a disdain for politics, political work and representative democracy'. Symbolically, they started talking about the postwar era in the past tense. 'The postwar era', Palme argued, 'was materially extraordinarily successful', so successful, that the SAP could be permitted to carelessly campaign with the slogan *Make good times better*. But now 'the price we pay for it is becoming clear: unemployment, destruction of the environment, inflation'.¹ This was the conclusion of *les trente glorieuses*, and 'the end of the easy times'.²

The end of the postwar era had two faces which both posed different challenges to the people's parties. One could be called the 'challenge of '68': the wave of strikes and protests of social movements which was the culmination of decades of quick social changes. This challenged the people's parties to invent new ways to reconnect to a more fluid society which sought more flexible forms of participation and inclusion in decision-making. However, at the same time, they also faced the, in their eyes, much more urgent, imperative to cure the gravest economic downturn since the 1930s, with quickly rising unemployment, hikes in inflation, and mounting government debts as alarming indicators. This was what we could call the 'challenge of '73'. So together these two big challenges put the ability of the

¹ W. Brandt, B. Kreisky, and O. Palme, *Briefe und Gespräche* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1975), 18, 78, 90.

² J. Fourastié, *Les trente glorieuses ou la révolution invisible* (Paris: Fayard, 1979), 255. See for the changing tide also H. Kaelbe, *The 1970s in Europe: A Period of Disillusionment or Promise?* (London: German Historical Institute, 2009); Wirsching, ed., 'The 1970s and 1980s as Turning Point'.

people's parties to provide representation and responsible government simultaneously to the test. They made the reconciliation of these objectives harder and they pushed people's parties in opposing directions. The challenge of '68 compelled parties to rethink their organization, find ways to reconnect to citizens and innovate in order to reach out to society. The challenge of '73 required them to focus on governing what seemed increasingly ungovernable societies facing a steep economic downturn. In confronting this dilemma, party leaders often gave priority to the latter. Indeed, precisely in the phase of their declining standing with citizens they found a new purpose in their claim to provide 'governability'.

While the next chapter focuses on how 'governability' became the overriding purpose of the people's parties over the course of the late 1970s and 1980s, this chapter looks at the response of party leaders to the challenges that '68 (and all it stood for in the years that followed) posed to how the people's parties organized and represented. It shows how party leaders came to realize that the Oil Crisis was not just the end of the postwar economic boom, but that the economic miracle itself had slowly undermined the social basis of their own success. Already back in 1965, one prominent Italian Christian Democrat warned that 'the transformations that are currently gripping Italian society ever more clearly reveal a process of isolation of political parties If they want to defend their decisive function in a quickly changing society they must adapt their structures, their methods and encourage a new type of recruitment and formation of the political class.'³ Also elsewhere, party leaders realized that the increasingly fluid and individualized societies of the postwar boom undermined the prospects of the people's parties themselves. But despite this realization they responded almost universally by underlining the continued importance of the ideals of the people's parties. They did not fundamentally transform themselves in order to connect to changing forms of participation. Little came of the ambitions to 'adapt their structures, their methods'. As the chapter concludes, therefore, this reaffirmation of the model of the people's party was not sufficient to satisfy the need to re-invent the relationship between citizens and their political leaders that the challenge of '68 was about. And this contributed to the sentiment, expressed by Palme, that there was a 'hangover' of industrial society in which 'many fear that the future of democracy looks dim'.⁴

On 10 May 1968, tensions between students and the Paris police that had been simmering for weeks came to a full explosion. That night thousands of students occupied the Latin Quarter, home to the Sorbonne University. They broke up the

³ L. Granelli, 'Classe politica e rinnovamento dei partiti', in DC, *Il ruolo dei partiti nella democrazia cristiana. Atti del convegno di studio promosso dal comitato regionale della Democrazia Cristiana Lombarda. Cadenabbia, 18-19 settembre 1965* (Rome: Edizione Cinque Lune, 1965), 409-40: 412-13.

⁴ Brandt, Kreisky, and Palme, *Briefe*, 90.

cobblestones of the streets and erected dozens of barricades, some of them up to three metres high. The police soon attacked with tear gas to clear the quarter of demonstrators, arresting everyone who looked slightly suspicious. At dusk, 1,000 people had been wounded, 500 had been arrested, and 180 vehicles had gone up in flames. But this was merely the start. Three days later, the largest trade union offered its solidarity to the students and took over the streets of Paris in a massive rally that was held symbolically exactly on the day ten years after De Gaulle returned to power. Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the informal leader of the students, marched on the first row along veteran union leaders to display the unity of old and new left. The Parisian protests of early May spread like an oil stain across the country. By the end of the month, France came to a full gridlock. An estimated eight to ten million workers were on strike by that time. De Gaulle responded by calling new parliamentary elections, while his prime minister Georges Pompidou placated the unions by offering workers a 10 per cent pay rise.

The epicentre of the '68 protests in Western Europe may have been Paris, if only for the historical symbolism that scenes of barricades in the French capital carried for protesters elsewhere. But the demonstrations, strikes, and occupations on the left-bank of the Seine were but one part of a long wave of activism.⁵ The student protests were a global phenomenon, happening simultaneously on campuses in California, factories in Turin, and otherwise quiet university towns in provincial Germany. Students were increasingly critical of the traditional institutions of representation, whether they be traditional student unions or youth wings of political parties. Instead, they started to practice new modes of decision-making. However, the social movements that sprang from of the '68 protests did not remain limited to university campuses. The feminist movements, such as *Dolle Mina* in the Netherlands and Belgium, or the Women's Liberation Movement in France protested the idealization of housewives and mothers and campaigned in favour of abortion and divorce legislation. Their modes of protest were creative and sure to draw controversy and attention. The French Women's Liberation Movement lay a wreath on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Arc de Triomphe to pay tribute to his 'unknown wife', the *Dolle Minas* campaigned for public toilets for women, a feminist group in Italy published its first magazine with an appeal to 'spit on Hegel', holding the nineteenth-century German philosopher responsible for the conviction that the main function of women was reproductivity. Meanwhile, the Milanese *Movimento Studentesco* fraternized with workers at the Pirelli car tyre factory close by. It was reflective for how in Italy (the offspring of) the student movement mixed with industrial workers.⁶ Environmentalist

⁵ R. Gildea, J. Mark, and A. Warring, *Europe's 1968: Voices of Revolt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁶ R. Lumley, *States of Emergency. Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (London: Verso, 1990), 116ff.

groups followed suit, especially in Germany. Soon, there were over 600 citizen groups that campaigned against the oil industry, destruction of forests, but most of all against nuclear energy by blocking transports, tying themselves to trees and fences, and staging street demonstrations.

The variety in both their means and ends was precisely what characterized the social movements of the 1970s. They reflected a society that thanks to decades of growing affluence and progressive secularization became ever more individualized and fluid; a process that the sociologist Ronald Inglehart labelled the 'silent revolution'. It caused people to appreciate 'self-expression spontaneity' as core value and made them suspect of hierarchical organizations—political or otherwise.⁷ Precisely this individualism caused a lot of variety among and inside the social movements, and often led to debates, rifts, and splits inside their ranks. But they also shared practices and criticisms that hit the people's parties where it hurt them most: in their claims that they, and they only, embodied democracy. The shared critique of the social movements was threefold.⁸

First, they targeted the ability of people's parties to facilitate political participation from below. Parties had centralized bureaucracies and held annual congresses where delegates sent by regional sections met. In theory, these delegates held the party leadership accountable, in practice they often rubberstamped the leadership's decisions. The social movements, by contrast, were smaller and more flexible. They could be organized locally, or even at the micro level, and often rejected the principle of delegation. So, no annual congresses, but deliberations, sit-ins, and discussions were what democracy was about. They deliberately refused to get formal, predictable, and centralized structures that resembled those of established political parties or unions. Rather, their creed was *spontaneismo* as the Italians called it.

Second, many activists spoke out against the tendency of parties to reduce democracy to mere 'administration', as Tingsten had labelled it before. Whereas party leaders considered their claimed capacity to plan and manage the economy and society as their unique selling point, this allegedly damaged democracy. Parties, in their role as 'managers', deprived citizens of agency and created a huge bureaucracy that was hard to control or to hold accountable. As democracy was about participation and thrived by ideological debate, parties harmed it by spending so much energy on reconciling different interests and govern society into the smallest detail.

The rise of social movements finally also casted a shadow over the inclusive claims of people's parties to represent the people as a whole. With the accelerating disintegration of their traditional Catholic and working-class support base, it

⁷ Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution*, 16.

⁸ See on the conceptions of democracy of the '68 generation also: Gassert, 'Narratives of Democratization'.

became much more difficult to express shared concerns and identities. But there were also many people who pointed to the hollowness of the people's parties' claim that they were there for the 'entire people in all its categories' (as the DC had called it after the War). Many new issues, and the new political identities that followed from them, were not represented by the people's parties.⁹ This counted in the first place for women in the so-called second wave of feminism. Their organizations were not only among the most creative of the 1970s, but also among the most effective, as changes in family, abortion, and divorce legislation and the establishment of special government bodies for women proved. But they also challenged their own marginalization and the patriarchy in established political parties, which mirrored the patriarchy of postwar societies more widely. The same feeling of not being represented counted for many adherents of the numerous peace movements, spurred first by the war in Vietnam, and somewhat later by the escalating tensions in the Cold War. And it counted for the expanding environmentalist movements, stimulated by the first report of the Club of Rome, also founded in 1968, which warned about the devastating effects of economic growth on the environment. Such movements found themselves increasingly standing opposite the major parties, which all agreed on foreign policy and defence issues and were committed to a model of economic growth that heavily depended on fossil fuels.

At first, many politicians viewed the protests of the late 1960s and early 1970s primarily as a problem of public order and safety.¹⁰ Many belittled the protestors as naïve or depicted them as radicals threatening hard-won stabilities and securities. Paradoxically, such displays of conservative disdain matched that of the largest opposition parties, the French and Italian Communists. The French Communist leader denounced Cohn-Bendit as an 'anarchist German' and 'pseudo-revolutionary' whose protests were allegedly playing in the hand of De Gaulle. It showed how politicians wanted to reassert their own political centrality. This was perhaps most clearly visible in the massive Gaullist counterdemonstration in Paris on 30 May 1968, in which 800,000 French waved the *tricolor* in support of the General and in defiance of the students.¹¹

However, such rejections of a new kind of citizenship could not be sustained for long. What soon emerged among people's party leaders was a pattern in which they publicly praised the more active model of citizenship that social movements advocated without critically reviewing their own organization nor the people's party model of democracy at large.

⁹ Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, 665–679.

¹⁰ See also: Corduener, *The Problem of Democracy*, 114–116.

¹¹ F. Georgi, 'Le pouvoir et dans la rue. La "manifestation gaulliste" des Champs-Élysées (30 mai 1968)', *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire* 48.4 (1995), 46–60.

Socialist politicians were generally most welcoming of the new social movements and their agenda of democratization and participation. They felt that the tide was turning in their favour, confirmed by the electoral success of Brandt in Germany in 1969, Kreisky in Austria in 1970, and Joop den Uyl in the Netherlands and Olof Palme in Sweden in 1973, which made the decade following 1968 seem like a 'red decade'.¹² Brandt captured the spirit of the age with his slogan (and promise) to 'dare more democracy' when he became Chancellor. With the Socialist advance in government across the continent came a whole series of reforms, in the sphere of civil liberties (legalizing divorce and abortion, decriminalizing homosexuality), education (more financial support for lower-income students, expanding possibilities for university education), and social security (higher pensions, more affordable healthcare, child benefits).

Even if the cry to 'dare more democracy' was sometimes more rhetorical than real, there were some serious initiatives in this field. Especially the PS and SPD paid tribute to the cry for more autonomy in the form of co-decision or 'self-government' at the workplace.¹³ The SPD enacted a co-decision law which gave employees equal representation on the management board of larger firms. In the PS, the enthusiasm for *autogestion* was perhaps even greater. This was mostly the accomplishment of one of the Socialist leaders who had always been close to the '68 movements: Michel Rocard. Rocard was a young and ambitious Parisian politician and a former Socialist dissident. He was one of the few established politicians who could claim some street credibility with the protestors. Rocard held that the objective of socialism should be to enable people to take control over their own destiny and their own lives, at home as well as at work. Indeed, as Rocard stated, self-management should be developed 'most of all in the organisation of production but it is not limited to that. Every man, every woman, should stop being subjected in whatever aspect of life.'¹⁴ Rocard was not without political ambition, and he vied with Mitterrand for the leadership of the PS. If, in the end, Rocard proved no match for Mitterrand, this was partly because the latter successfully embraced *autogestion* to keep the party together and strengthen his leadership. Against the traditional left-wing of the party, he assured that 'self-management, in my eyes, does not contradict our fundamental analyses, it is their extension. If we want to preserve the chances of socialism... we must maintain the process which aims to make the individual responsible for their own destiny.'¹⁵

¹² G. Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt. Unsere kleine Deutsche Kulturrevolution 1967–1977* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2001).

¹³ Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 351.

¹⁴ M. Rocard, 'Pour l'autogestion' (1972), in M. Rocard, *Parler vrai. Textes politiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), 102–3.

¹⁵ F. Mitterrand, *Discours de Francois Mitterrand aux Assises du socialisme 1974*, found on <https://www.mitterrand.org/discours-de-francois-mitterrand-aux-assises-du-socialisme.html>.

Several Christian Democrats saw these progressive challenges to their norms inside and outside parliament as a threat to their own ideological and electoral hegemony. No one should be surprised that Christian democracy is in crisis, ÖVP-leader Jozef Klaus stated in 1971, because 'its core values Christian religion and democracy are in crisis'. The solution, at least for him, was to retrace this crisis to its roots and then try and take another historical turn cherishing the values of Christian democracy's anti-Marxist founding fathers like De Gasperi, Schuman, and Adenauer.¹⁶ Such calls for renewed polarization with the left, both inside and outside parliament, was the first reaction to the challenge of '68 of many Christian Democrats (and Gaullists). They found perhaps their clearest expression in the German elections of 1972. These were the first snap elections in the history of the Federal Republic, triggered by a failed vote of no-confidence in Brandt by the CDU-opposition. Unsurprisingly, these elections turned into a plebiscite on Brandt's Chancellorship, his policies of *détente* with the Soviet bloc, and his whole promise to 'dare more democracy', including his reconciliatory tone to the social movements. For some of his more prominent Christian Democrat opponents, Brandt's attempt to claim the legacy of the 1968 protests showed that 'a shared democratic framework is missing'.¹⁷ Brandt nonetheless won the elections and for the first time the SPD became bigger than the Christian Democrats.

Blows like the defeat of De Gaulle in the referendum of 1969 and CDU's election loss in 1972 showed that the polarization strategy failed to produce the desired effect. The more participatory notion of democracy that gained ground in society at large deserved a more thoughtful, elaborate, and most of all more modest response.¹⁸ With Helmut Kohl the CDU got a leader who was able to lead a necessary transition of the party in this direction. Kohl was a young and somewhat maverick politician, a liberal reformer who seemed in touch with the quick changes in German society and who did not hesitate to challenge traditions—or authorities. Already on the first meeting of the party board he ever attended as a young MP, back in 1964, he set his reputation by daring to criticize Adenauer's somewhat authoritarian style of leadership and his lack of interest in party members.¹⁹ Once in charge, Kohl aimed to bring the CDU back to power after losing two elections to Brandt's SPD. His strategy was not by being overtly ideological or polemical, but by being 'between ideology and pragmatism', as he titled one of his books, in which he redefined Christian democracy in liberal

¹⁶ J. Klaus, *Macht und Ohnmacht in Österreich. Konfrontationen und Versuche* (Vienna: Molden, 1971), 408–10.

¹⁷ F. J. Strauß, 'Den Abenteuer ein Ende setzen!' (1972), in F. J. Strauß, *Signale. Beiträge zur deutschen Politik 1969–1978* (Munich: Verlag Bayernkurier, 1978), 96–102: 96.

¹⁸ F. Bösch, 'Die Krise als Chance. Die Neuformierung der Christdemokraten in den Siebziger Jahren', in K. H. Jarausch, *Das Ende der Zuversicht Die siebziger Jahre als Geschichte* (Göttingen: Brill Deutschland, 2008), 296–309 and A. Knapp, *Gaullism since de Gaulle* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1994).

¹⁹ F. Bösch, *Macht und Machtverlust*, 7.

and pluralist terms, because 'freedom, equality and justice are Christian values'.²⁰ The Christian roots of the party should not stand in the way of embracing the more participatory understanding of democracy that gained ground in German society. Exemplifying this, Kohl invested his energy in a successful attempt to increase the number of the members of the party: their number soon topped a million.

The rebranding of the CDU under Kohl showed that after the left Christian Democrats were now also willing to pay tribute, at least in words, to some of the themes of the extra-parliamentary left. Christian Democrat parties began referring to the importance of environmental protection, the values of world peace ('peace with less weapons', as Kohl rephrased the peace movement's slogan 'peace without weapons'), gender equality, and a more engaged form of democracy. The Christian Democrats should, as the leading CDU-politician Richard von Weizsäcker claimed, see the 'crisis as an opportunity... an opportunity to renew our democratic strength'.²¹ With his characteristic reconciliatory tone, Aldo Moro wrote in the Christian Democrat newspaper that 'to the young I want to say that I am aware of their hardship, and I truly understand their aspiration of change the world around them'.²² In similar terms, De Gaulle's successor Pompidou combined empathy for the students and the way they 'felt helpless in relation to professional life' and 'materialist society' with reassuring comments about the viability and resilience of the Fifth Republic's institutions, which had shown so much flexibility that they could absorb the protests.²³ A few years later, his successor as leader of Gaullism, Jacques Chirac, made 'participation' central to his political programme. He stated that 'the French no longer only want to be consulted at fixed moments' and instead want to 'live democracy on a daily basis, an open democracy that permits citizens to be at the same time active and to display solidarity'.²⁴

So, after a period of initial polarization all people's parties emphasized their common ground and found each other in a tribute to a more participatory notion of democracy and an openness to social trends which put new issues on the agenda.²⁵ But this commitment was most of all verbal and did not show in innovations inside party organizations. This made it difficult for them to facilitate

²⁰ H. Kohl, *Zwischen Ideologie und Pragmatismus. Aspekte und Ansichten zu Grundfragen der Politik* (Stuttgart: Verlag Bonn Aktuell, 1973), 25, 75, 92ff.

²¹ R. von Weizsäcker, *Die Krise als Chance* (Munich: Seewald, 1975).

²² A. Moro, 'Dialogo con i giovani' (1968), in A. Moro, *Scritti e Discorsi. Volume Quarto 1966-1968* (Rome: Edizione Cinque Lune, 1986), 2570-1.

²³ G. Pompidou, *Le nœud gordien* (Paris: Plon, 1974), 25ff.

²⁴ RPR, *La démocratie du quotidien* (Paris: RPR, 1977), 3.

²⁵ See on the conceptions of political elites in the face of the challenge of the 1970s more generally: Corduener, *The Problem of Democracy*, 114-6.

political participation from below in the face of the sweeping social changes of the postwar decades that increasingly ate away the traditional support groups of both Christian Democrats and Socialists. In a more individualized society, voters had much less traditional allegiance to their party and their political identities were more fluid.

For Socialists, this meant that growing affluence and the shift from industrial work to office work ate away their blue-collar support base.²⁶ No self-respecting Socialist could help but notice that talking about working-class unity and capitalist exploitation increasingly mismatched the growing purchasing power of the white-collar workers that voted for their parties, even in times of economic problems. At the time of its Godesberg conference in 1959, the SPD was still predominantly a working-class party. Two decades later, six out of ten members were university graduates. The PSI counted only 1 per cent university graduates in 1945, but in the early 1970s that figure had risen to almost one in five members. At the same time, workers were now officially a minority among the rank and file.²⁷ The Dutch Labour Party made an extensive investigation of its own party cadre in 1978 and concluded that only 10 per cent considered itself to be working class, while over half of its officials was higher educated.²⁸

Christian Democrat supporters traditionally had a more diverse social background, but these parties had their own challenges. The quick economic growth not only made the average citizen much more affluent but also contributed to the erosion of religious authority. As Adenauer put it in 1962, 'we have reached a remarkable level of affluence. But as fundament of our party God has moved ever more to the background. This is connected to the general development in Germany, where secularization is gaining pace quickly.'²⁹ Church attendance dwindled. In the Netherlands, it fell by half in the decade between 1965 and 1975 alone—and continued to do so afterwards. The same counted for the popularity of the clergy. More than 800 priests had been ordained in France alone at the end of the 1950s. Two decades later they numbered only 181.³⁰ The question was whether an appeal to religious values, however universally phrased, was still sufficient to rally voters who ever less identified as religious themselves. Sometimes, voters proved to be far more progressive and secular than the party

²⁶ Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 385ff.

²⁷ PSI, *Base sociale e strutture del partito. Quaderni della sezione centrale di organizzazione* (Rome: PSI, 1974), xviii–xviii.

²⁸ I. Lipschits, L. P. Middel, and W. H. van Schuur, 'Het middenkader van de Partij van de Arbeid. Een voorlopig verslag van het onderzoek naar de afgevaardigden op het Raads- en Statencongres 1978', *Jaarboek DNPP* (1978), 95–123: 100–1.

²⁹ Konrad Adenauer at the Bundesvorstand of 11 December 1961, in CDU, *Adenauer: Stetigkeit in der Politik. Die Protokolle des CDU-Bundesvorstands 1961–1965* (Hannover: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 1998), 96.

³⁰ H. McLeod, 'The Religious Crisis of the 1960s', *Journal of Modern European History* 3.2 (2005), 205–30.

leadership—and forced the leadership to change. The DC triggered a corrective referendum to roll back the legalization of divorce in 1974. But despite support of the Vatican, it lost. Some concluded that the solution in relating better to the ‘new society’ did not lie in a closer relationship with the Church, but in ‘more frequent and closer relationship with social movements, and particularly with the new groups that emerged from a changing society’.³¹

In the face of the challenge of ’68, the ranks of the people’s party closed. With a newly found Christian Democrat appreciation for active citizenship and political involvement, the ideological divide that initially emerged between Christian Democrats and Socialists after ’68 soon narrowed. Both major political families now adopted themes like gender equality, environmental protection, and references to participatory democracy. Indeed, Brandt praised the ‘vital sense of civic commitment’ as the ‘new centre ground’.³² They continued to share a commitment to the principles of people’s party democracy that belonged to the postwar era—an era that was, many agreed, paradoxically belonging to the past. Even Brandt warned that the cry for more participation and radical democratization of the social movements at times went too far. ‘Many understand something by democracy’, he argued, ‘that is actually a step backwards: applying the principles of democracy schematically and without inhibitions to the most diverse areas of society’.³³ ‘Daring more democracy’, had its limits and those limits were those of the established institutions of parliamentary democracy and the dominant place of the people’s parties in it. If these were perceived to be threatened, politicians would not hesitate to protect them.

In Germany and Italy, the sharp rise in terrorist violence further contributed to this trend to affirm the common ground.³⁴ In Germany, this violence came from radical left-wing groups that had split from the ’68 movements. These groups staged robberies, kidnappings, and bombings, and their violence culminated with the kidnapping and murder of public figures such as the German attorney general and high-profile bankers and businessmen. The SPD-government responded with a harsh crackdown on the terrorists and did not hesitate to use force when needed. This willingness to actively defend democracy and democratic values was also

³¹ A. Ruffini, *La democrazia cristiana di fronte ai problemi della nuova società italiana. Intervento al consiglio nazionale, Roma, 19.7.1974* (Rome, 1974), 13.

³² W. Brandt, ‘Aus der Regierungserklärung des Bundeskanzlers Brandt vor dem Deutschen Bundestag, 18 Januar 1973’, in W. Brandt, *Berliner Ausgabe. Mehr Demokratie wagen. Innen und Gesellschaftspolitik 1966–1974* (Bonn: Dietz Verlag, 2001), 404–9: 408.

³³ W. Brandt, ‘Politik in Deutschland—Wertvorstellungen unter Ideologieverdacht. Aus der Rede des Bundeskanzlers, Brandt, in der Evangelischen Akademie in Bad Segeberg (1973)’, in W. Brandt, *Mehr Demokratie Wagen*, 444–56: 452.

³⁴ The classic comparative account of this period remains: D. Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence and the State. A Comparative Analysis of Germany and Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

visible in the 'solidarity of the democrats' with which CDU in opposition and SPD in government emphasized their joint commitment to the constitution and democratic freedoms.³⁵

In Italy, neo-Fascist and extreme-left terrorists fought each other and the state in a long violent campaign. The violence came to an apex with the kidnapping and murder of Moro by the Red Brigades. Just as in Germany the SPD and CDU emphasized the 'solidarity of democrats' in face of the terrorist threat, the Italian parties also displayed the force of unity.³⁶ Moro was kidnapped on the way to parliament to attend the vote of confidence in the first government since 1947 that enjoyed Communist support. This government thereby embodied the rapprochement between Socialist, Christian Democrats, and Communist parties and was part of Communist-leader Enrico Berlinguer's strategy to forge a 'historic compromise' to safeguard Italian democracy.³⁷ This plea had been welcomed by Moro, who had reasoned that just as the DC had forged a coalition with the PSI to stabilize democracy, it should also, and for the same reason, collaborate somehow with the PCI now that the country's democratic institutions were so openly attacked (even if this collaboration should not lead to a government coalition).

The 'emergency government' which enjoyed backbench PCI-support was motivated partly by this desire to establish a common ground in difficult times. With Italian democracy under assault from terrorists of the extreme left and extreme right and left-wing governments ousted by military coups in Greece and Chile, Berlinguer realized that the Communists could not come to power (let alone stay in it) in Italy by the traditional dynamic of government alternation. This, he feared, would trigger a violent reaction at home and possibly foreign intervention by the US as well. He therefore advocated what he called a 'democratic alternative, or a collaboration between the popular forces of communist and socialist inspiration with those of Catholic inspiration . . . to guarantee the democratic future of our Republic'.³⁸ Much more clearly than Togliatti before, he stated his commitment to parliamentary institutions 'also during the construction of socialism' and maintained distance from Moscow, even stating that he 'felt safer' on this side of the Iron Curtain. Berlinguer also went a long way in accepting the free market economy, which 'has an important function in fostering efficiency and in stimulating entrepreneurship'.³⁹

³⁵ K. Hanshew, *Terror and Democracy in West Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

³⁶ A. Giovagnoli, *Il Caso Moro. Una tragedia repubblicana* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005).

³⁷ F. Barbagallo, 'Enrico Berlinguer, il compromesso storico e l'alternativa democratica', *Studi storici* 45.4 (2004), 939–49 and S. Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2006).

³⁸ E. Berlinguer, 'Riflessioni sull'Italia dopo i fatti del Cile' (1973), in E. Berlinguer, *La crisi italiana. Scritti su Rinascita* (Rome: Editrice L'Unità, 1985), 45–75: 70.

³⁹ E. Berlinguer, 'La proposta di alternativa per il cambiamento', in E. Berlinguer, *Economia, stato, pace: l'iniziativa e le proposte del PCI. Rapporto, conclusioni e documento politico del XVI Congresso* (Rome: Editori riuniti, 1983), 75–172: 110.

Berlinguer's emphasis on the virtues of compromise and consensus showed that the model of the 'people's party' was continuously on his mind. He was engaged in a dialogue with Willy Brandt and prepared to go some way in this direction—indeed his reference to Christian democracy as a force that should no longer be seen as a party of the bourgeois domination but as a force 'where also other social and economic groups meet' testified to just this people's party characteristic to search for common ground.⁴⁰ His actions were an inspiration for other Communist-leaders in the West, in particular in France and Spain, to such an extent that their joint efforts were labelled 'eurocommunism'. However, in the end, the 'historic compromise' did not go so far as to eliminate the PCI's ultimate aim to overcome capitalism and 'bourgeois democracy'. As such, the model of the people's party as it was practiced by the DC (or, for Berlinguer, especially the SPD), might have been a source of inspiration for Berlinguer, but also a model that he was never willing to embrace completely. And thereby his attempt to find a 'third way' between people's party and Soviet-style communism was doomed from the start. With its distinct Stalinist-like organization, its ambivalence on its ultimate revolutionary objectives, and its alliance with Moscow, there were limits to Berlinguer's reforms, despite that the PCI temporarily supported the DC-government. By 1979, the PCI was back in the opposition benches, and it lost votes at every national election throughout the coming decade.

Even though the PCI's reforms had limits, Berlinguer's plans for a historic compromise showed that the values of the people's party—compromise, collaboration, consensus—could still function as a model that others sought to emulate. It seemed to suggest that the people's party survived the challenge of 1968 unscathed and that the self-assurance of political leaders about this model was somehow justified. Indeed, as a leading CDU-politician remarked, by now 'other parties . . . seek to imitate us . . . essential parts of our programme have either been realized, while others try more to copy them rather than to contest them'.⁴¹ He referred in the first place to the SPD. But also elsewhere, for party elites at least, the people's party remained a model that could be adopted and even transferred. This was most clearly the case for the Spanish and Portuguese Socialist parties which emerged from hiding under decades-old dictatorships in the 1970s. In Portugal, the '*Estado Novo*', a Catholic-corporatist regime for a long time under dictatorship of António de Oliveira Salazar, was brought down by a military coup in 1974. Spain followed suit after the death of Franco the next year. The Portuguese and Spanish transitions to democracy were of course different from one another, just

⁴⁰ Berlinguer, 'Riflessioni sull'Italia', 72. See also F. Lussana, 'Il confronto con le socialdemocrazie e la ricerca di un nuovo socialismo nell'ultimo Berlinguer', *Studi storici* 45.2 (2004), 461–88.

⁴¹ 'Referat Rainer Barzel vor dem Bundesparteiausschuß am 2. Juni 1962', in 11. *Bundesparteitag der Christlich-Demokratischen Union Deutschlands 2–5 Juni Dortmund* (Bonn: CDU, 1962), 331–45: 332.

as their authoritarian systems of rule had been of a different nature. But what they had in common was that democratization was buttressed by moderate people's parties—and that people's parties abroad actively supported them.⁴²

This export of the people's party was quite literally the case for the Portuguese Socialist Party. This party was not founded in Lisbon or Porto, but in the small German village of Bad Münstereifel, just south of Bonn. Here lay the headquarters of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the think tank and foreign office of the SPD. Exactly a year before the 1974 coup that started the transition to democracy, a group of Portuguese exiles around the dissident leader Mário Soares gathered in Bad Münstereifel to establish the *Partido Socialista*. In the first years, the SPD supported its sister party with financial resources, advice, and technical support. In this way, it aimed to steer the party in a moderate direction. The SPD's ambitions were largely realized. Despite its long period in exile and its covert opposition to a dictatorial regime, the Portuguese Socialists were not taken over by ideological hardliners. Rather, Soares managed to side-line the radical left in the party and turn the PS into a moderate Socialist party which successfully isolated the Communists.

The SPD stepped up its efforts to export its own people's party model when the democratic transition of Portugal was followed by political change in Spain. When the PSOE held its first free party congress in decades in 1976, virtually the entire *beau monde* of European socialism was present: Mitterrand, Nenni, Brandt, and Palme were all there. Brandt threw his weight behind the young and moderate PSOE-leader Felipe González. His support was vital. The Spanish Socialists at the time employed merely two full-time party officials (one of them being González himself).⁴³ The SPD quickly set up a permanent office in Madrid and the SPD's delegation's task was to help foster the organization of the PSOE on the ground. The first move of the PSOE was to establish offices and sent representatives to twenty-seven provincial capitals; the salaries and expenses were paid by the FES. At the same time, the SPD supported the PSOE's central office in Madrid with training for the party cadre. Three years later, the PSOE had 100,000 members and was the second party of Spain in terms of votes.

Just as its Portuguese counterpart, the Spanish Socialist party was initially not only small and badly organized but also riven with rival factions that clung to Marxist ideas that had long become outdated elsewhere. Opposite these factions stood González's followers, who embodied a forward-looking and moderate blend of socialism. Just like Soares, González had to placate the Marxists in the party while at the same time safeguarding his goal of moderate reform.

⁴² On the role of party organization in the transition to democracy, see: I. van Biezen, *Political Parties in New Democracies. Party Organization in Southern and East-Central Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁴³ Quoted by A. M. Sanchez, 'The Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Spanish Socialists during the Transition to Democracy, 1975–1982', *Contemporary European History* 25.1 (2016), 143–62: 146.

He simultaneously stated that the PSOE 'is a class party in its composition, its history and its plans', and that it was a class party 'in the modern sense, not anchored in the nineteenth century'. Gonzales was convinced that the success of his movement depended on his ability to make the PSOE the spearhead of a broad progressive coalition that went far beyond working-class members. Therefore, he told his fellow party members that he 'tried to encapsulate in the party all sectors of society'.⁴⁴ González's aim was to turn the PSOE into a moderate left-wing people's party, because only in this way, and by its 'quasi consociational' collaboration with the Popular Party, could Spanish democracy be fully secured.⁴⁵ It placated the Spanish right, who, in the words of Manuel Fraga, a former Franco-minister and now founder of the Christian democratic Popular Party, let it be known that for Spain's democratization to be successful it needed the PSOE to be 'a party like the SPD'.⁴⁶

As such, Social democrats across Europe in general, and the SPD in particular, played a vital role in ensuring that a moderate kind of socialism gained the upper hand in two countries where on the eve of democratization the Communist parties seemed to hold the best cards. The people's parties of Western Europe thereby served as a model to be emulated. The PSOE adopted its new party symbol of a rising sun as well as its slogan 'Socialism is Liberty' from the Swedish Socialists. Especially the financial support of the SPD was at times and later criticized as foreign interference in domestic affairs. But Brandt was always convinced that it was the right thing to do, recalling later that he was 'still proud today that under my leadership the SPD helped Spanish democracy on its feet with more than beautiful words alone'.⁴⁷

The new democracies on the Iberian peninsula therefore obtained a party system that resembled that of the older democracies of Western Europe. Spain and Portugal both saw the alternance in government of a moderately conservative party with a moderate Socialist party. In the spirit of the progressive revolution in Portugal, this conservative party named itself the Social Democratic Party, but its programme and policies were in line with Christian Democrat parties elsewhere. The same counted for the Spanish People's Party, which moreover received support from the CDU just as the PSOE had from the SPD. In comparison with the people's parties of the Low Countries, Austria, Belgium, and Italy, they were marked by relatively low membership numbers and sharp factionalism. But when it came to their programmes, commitment to pluralism and a sense of government responsibility they mirrored closely the people's parties across the border.

⁴⁴ F. González, 'Línea política del PSOE', in PSOE, *Socialismo es Libertad. Escuela de Verano del PSOE 1976* (Madrid: Ed. Cuadernos para el dialogo, 1976), 21–58.

⁴⁵ Van Biezen, *Political Parties in New Democracies*, 4.

⁴⁶ Quoted by Sanchez, 'The Friedrich Ebert Foundation', 148.

⁴⁷ W. Brandt, *Erinnerungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1989), 348.

The success of the people's party model in Portugal and Spain seemed to suggest that the people's party model withstood the challenge of '68 unscathed. However, by the end of the 1970s it became increasingly evident that the challenges to the people's party were far from over, but only became bigger. The 'silent revolution' towards a society that was more flexible, fluid, and rebellious than before was gathering speed. But in the eyes of many citizens, the efforts of party elites to open to the practices and ideas of the social movements had been mostly rhetorical. Sure, there had been progress made in the field of civil liberties, but in the end political leaders had rallied around the model of the people's party with a limited conception of how far 'daring more democracy' should reach. Instead, the answers to the challenge to their authority seemed to underline the very consensus-driven elitism that had come under scrutiny. The Historic Compromise between PCI, PSI, and DC to strengthen Italian democracy during an economic and terrorist crisis perfectly fitted the postwar narrative of compromise and collaboration in times of need. But it was also precisely the kind of elitist party-political project from above rather an invitation to participate from below that many people criticized as being a fundamental weakness in how democracy functioned. Spain after Franco's death might be a textbook example of a successful and peaceful 'negotiated' democratic transition, but also here the grass roots of the PSOE were hardly involved.⁴⁸ Rather, although rising, membership remained exceptionally low for both them and the Popular Party, showing how the ideal of the people's parties functioned mostly on the level of ideas and government, but resonated much less on the ground.

The question was therefore whether the proponents of the people's party were not trying to export a model that was running its course. By the end of the 1970s, party elites in Europe still struggled to formulate a convincing answer to the challenge of '68. The mushrooming of all kinds of new movements had invited them to critically assess the weaknesses of their own allegedly hierarchical, rigid, and patriarchal organizations. They were also challenged to critically evaluate their growing preference for managing economic policies rather than engaging with ordinary citizens who might have all kinds of different concerns, not just about the economy but also about identity, civil rights, world peace, and the environment. The social movements empowered a new generation of leaders like Brandt, Kreisky, Kohl, and Rocard who tried to speak to the minds and hearts of protestors and demonstrators and endorsed a more active citizenship.

But, in the end, the main response seemed a reaffirmation of the people's party model and its alleged superiority. Even the new generation of leaders often spoke with open disdain about the social movements and their ideas and practices. One prominent SPD intellectual ridiculed the social movement activists, who 'go around the country today searching for organic food, tomorrow open up a

⁴⁸ Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 423–6.

cooperative pub and the day after tomorrow squat a house'.⁴⁹ With such comments, it is not surprising that the challenge of these movements did not lead to a critical evaluation of the organization of the people's parties nor of their conception of democracy. Instead, they praised the people's party model for its inclusiveness and ability to stabilize democracy in times of upheaval. Brandt himself, and he was representative for many other party leaders, was proud of how the SPD had managed to welcome new generations into its ranks. 'Where would our party, our society, our state, have been if the SPD had not had the courage to close the generation of the unrest of 1968 in its ranks? If it had renounced its integration.... This has been an important contribution to the stabilization of German democracy and the securing of domestic peace', he stated.⁵⁰

The confidence in the superiority of the people's party model left them blind to the fact that many citizens were not convinced by the answers it provided to the challenges of the 1970s. Many party leaders sang praise to themes such as 'co-decision' at the workplace, gender equality, and attention for the environment and peace, and even at times made legislation in this direction, but they did not respond to the desire for a substantially new kind of political participation—and a less distant and managerial style of politics. Neither did parties re-form their own model of organization, with its system of annual congresses or regional delegation. They did not yet structurally improve the position of women inside party ranks and did not find a solution to strengthen the relationships between the members of the old guard and newcomers. So after all it seemed as if the people's parties were increasingly losing touch with a quickly modernizing and individualizing society. One leading Italian Socialist self-critically remarked that 'society has profoundly changed, the general direction of the party has changed, the position that Socialists occupy inside our state has changed, but the structure of the PSI has not been renewed'.⁵¹ Another added that 'we Socialists always believe in the crucial function of parties... but we also believe that this function exists because of the continuous exchange between party and society. Society has made important progress, and it is up to the party now not to isolate itself'.⁵²

As such, the capacity of politicians like Brandt, Kohl, Rocard, and Kreisky to integrate a new generation of citizens in existing party organizations proved to be limited. They did not offer a convincing answer to the cry for a new kind of political participation that the challenge of '68 represented nor to the new and

⁴⁹ R. Löwenthal, 'Identität und Zukunft der SPD', *Neue Gesellschaft* 12 (1981), 1085–9: 1087. See also: Lösche and Walter, *Die SPD*, 121.

⁵⁰ W. Brandt, *Verantwortung für unseren Staat. Politik. Aktuelle Informationen der SPD. SPD-Parteitag 15–19 November 1977* (Bonn: Vorstand der SPD, 1977), 4.

⁵¹ G. Tamburrano, 'Il PSI dopo la scissione. Per un nuovo modello organizzativo' (1972), in G. Valluari, ed., *I partiti italiani tra declino e riforma. Saggi e documenti* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1982), 854–66: 862.

⁵² *Il PSI e i movimenti di base e di quartiere. Seminario della sezione organizzazione del partito nella società. Genova 21–22 maggio 1971* (Rome: PSI, 1971), 7.

much more fluid subcultures of the 1970s that replaced the working-class and confessional subcultures of before. After reaching a peak in the mid-1970s (for the CDU a few years later), membership numbers everywhere started to decline, even in countries like Italy and Austria where a significant number of citizens had always been members of one of the leading parties. And as the silent revolution continued through the following decade the representation of people from below became ever more complex. But this was not the only problem for political leaders. The fact that they struggled to provide answers to the challenge of '68 was also because they faced parallel challenges of a different nature at the same time: a steep economic downturn and growing concerns about the governability of Western European democracies. Many party leaders perceived this crisis as much more fundamental and existential. And it was therefore to this crisis that they devoted most of their energy.

The Challenge of 1973 and Governability as Leading Purpose

The turn of the 1970s came with impending economic doom. First, the United States torpedoed the Bretton Woods agreements, which was the pillar of the postwar international monetary system. Soon after, Middle Eastern countries cut down supplies to several European states, starting the first Oil Crisis. This crudely exposed the European dependency on foreign energy resources and contributed to sharply rising inflation. The economies of France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, and Italy shrunk for the first time since the 1940s. Unemployment numbers rose sharply. Belgium had 3 per cent unemployment in 1974, two years later that figure had already more than doubled. Even Germany, which fared relatively well economically, was badly hit. 185,000 people were out of work in 1971, but soon after the Oil Crisis this figure rose to over a million.¹ In other words, in the timespan of merely a few years the economic climate completely changed. And with the worsening of the economic climate the entire postwar model based on extensive government planning of the economy and mediation by the people's parties became suspect. As European governments seemed overburdened by demands from different social groups and by assertive citizens, they seemed ever less able to efficiently channel their resources and govern what seemed unruly societies and an overworked state.²

The economic downturn did not stand on itself but revealed what many saw as a crisis of governability. This chapter shows how, much more than about the complex problem of the gradual social changes that ate away their support base, symbolized by 1968, party leaders felt that they could play a role in solving this acute crisis. They were convinced they could provide an answer to the challenge of '73: providing governability. Sometimes motivated by memories of the 1930s, party leaders felt that the people's parties could distinguish themselves most of all by providing good and efficient government, by, as Peter Mair called it, emphasizing 'their capacity as good governors, administrators, managers of the polity'.³ In the process, the idea of what 'good government' constituted radically changed.

¹ Eichengreen, *The European Economy*, 242–63.

² M. Crozier, S. P. Huntington, and J. Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy. On the Governability of Democracies* (New York: NYU Press, 1975).

³ Mair, *Representative versus Responsible Government*, 9.

The people's parties no longer saw economic planning to foster social peace and cohesion as the top priority but shifted their attention to cutting down the size and ambitions of the state and its social programmes. This was believed to be the means to achieve higher economic growth and bring down unemployment and inflation. But this strategy came at a price. By seeing governability in neoliberal terms they limited the ambitions of the people's parties in terms of what they could contribute to social cohesion and their capacity to generate legitimacy from below. By the end of the 1980s, many people inside and outside the people's parties started to criticize this turn of people's parties to providing governability, as the gap between their electorate and those in power seemed to become ever wider.

The Oil Crisis and its aftermath are often understood as the moment of the descent of Keynesianism and the rise of neoliberalism as the dominant paradigm in economic thinking and policy-making.⁴ The argument that it was perhaps neither the task nor the capacity of governments to organize the economy and society in detail and that price stability and a balanced budget should be their prime concern had been put forward by the Chicago school of neoliberal thinkers for decades.⁵ But with the economic crisis of the 1970s these ideas received a larger and more receptive audience. This was especially the case in Britain and the United States where Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan brought these ideas most clearly into practice. Yet these ideas were not merely imported from overseas. Also on the European continent politicians and policy-makers aired similar views, even before Thatcher and Reagan came to power.⁶ Leading Italian Christian Democrats gathered for a conference in Perugia in December 1972 to outline their economic plans. Party leader Arnaldo Forlani noted there that the most obvious conclusion of the meeting was that 'the DC without a doubt made the choice to favour a market economy. For us this means that on the one hand the enterprise enjoys autonomy and will be the place of creativity and innovation, and, on the other hand, that the consumer is being left free to choose.' The time of planning, or 'programming', seemed over, as 'programming should not be a book of dreams'.⁷ Similarly, the director of the Italian Programming Commission looked back on the experience with economic planning one year later and concluded that 'while GPD-growth had been above our expectations, other and more important

⁴ A. Wirsching, G. Therbon, and G. Eley, 'Forum. The 1970s and 1980s as a Turning Point in European History?', *Journal of Modern European History* 9.1 (2011), 8–26.

⁵ D. S. Jones, *Masters of the Universe. Hayek, Friedman and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), ch. 6.

⁶ See also: Corduener, *The Problem of Democracy*, 126–127.

⁷ Intervention of Arnaldo Forlani, in DC, *I problemi dell'economia Italiana superamento della crisi e nuove prospettive di sviluppo sociale. Convegno nazionale di studi DC, Perugia, 9–12 dicembre 1972*, Vol. 3: *L'assemblea generale* (Rome: Edizione Cinque Lune, 1973), 325, 343.

objectives of planning, such as employment, regional differences and the resources devoted to collective needs have failed'.⁸

There was thus a shift away from belief in the virtues of economic planning towards a belief in the virtues of the free market. And this also implied that the traditional role of the people's parties themselves to plan, manage, and organize society was reconsidered. Christian Democrat and Gaullist politicians started to scrutinize not only the economic side, but also the moral side of extensive state intervention. Jacques Chirac launched a new party, the Rally for the Republic (RPR), with the ambition to revive Gaullism and contest the in his eyes dangerous plans of the French left. Chirac was born in the capital as the son of a well-off Catholic family of entrepreneurs. He quickly made career in the UNR, earning the nickname the Bulldozer for his efficiency and ruthlessness. This earned him the post of Prime Minister, but he became frustrated by the disunity of the French right and by what he perceived as its betrayal of Gaullist principles. So Chirac quit as prime minister and in December 1976 gathered over 60,000 followers in a Parisian conference hall to launch the RPR, aiming to unite the right and save the Gaullist heritage. The whole day was loaded with symbolism to mark both the continuity with the golden days of Gaullism and to signal a strong sign of political renewal of the 'neo-Gaullism' that Chirac sought to promote. The huge portraits of De Gaulle and Pompidou that decorated the stage in the morning were removed for the afternoon session, when the RPR was formally launched, and Chirac was elected with 96 per cent of the votes as the new leader.⁹ Gaullists traditionally favoured a strong and interventionist state, but the ideological sea-change engulfing European democracies was not lost on them. Chirac stood permanently in the spotlights in his double role as Paris mayor and leader of the neo-Gaullist party. And he continuously evoked the dangers of the left in government by dismissing the economic programme of the Socialists as 'pure fantasy. The nationalizations and *autogestion* will disorganize our entire industrial sector.'¹⁰ Instead, Chirac argued, 'we should give space to the vital role of freedom and competition' and stated that it was impossible to 'restore vitality to the French economy without ridding its first of countless regulations, Byzantine complications, and paperwork formalities'.¹¹

This claim was made more strongly after Mitterrand won the presidential elections of 1981. Soon after Mitterrand's victory, a group of prominent Gaullist politicians and thinkers established the *Club 89* which formulated a new programme of political economy for the country and which culminated in a true

⁸ Cited with Carabba, *Un ventennio di programmazione*, 288.

⁹ J. Pozzi, *Les mouvements gaullistes. Partis, associations et réseaux* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2019), 325.

¹⁰ J. Chirac, *La lueur de l'espérance. Réflexion du soir pour le matin* (Paris: Table ronde, 1978), 105.

¹¹ J. Chirac, *La Bataille de France. Discours prononcé au Rassemblement du 11 février 1978* (Paris: RPR, 1978), 15.

'strategy for government'.¹² This group made a plea for what it called a 'double rupture', not just with Mitterrand's administration, but also with 'the evolution over the course of the 1970s, which was more or less wanted, and more or less happened, that imposed on us a socialization of the economy and French society'.¹³ The programme had all the plans of the neoliberal playbook: tackling public deficit, halting inflation, and praised 'own responsibility' instead of social security and stopping with what was called 'obsession with regulations'.¹⁴ Indeed, 'economic recovery depends on the liberation of the enterprise', Chirac asserted, and this required 'deregulation and de-bureaucratization'.¹⁵ Across the border in Germany, Helmut Kohl made a similar plea, and rendered 'freedom' central to the politics of the CDU, even calling the Christian Democrats the 'only liberal party' of the country. In his speech to the 1975 party conference, he made clear that 'we do not want *dirigismus* and state paternalism, but more competition, more creative initiative, and more courage on the part of the individual. We do not want nationalization... we do not want to demonize profit but say clearly that profit is the driving force of our economy, and the chance of profit is the driving motivation of the individual.'¹⁶

Initially, such pleas were mostly heard among the parties of the centre-right, which found themselves in many countries in opposition. The reaction of many Socialists to the economic downturn of the 1970s was still Keynesian, and because they were in many places in government, the decade saw increased spending to combat unemployment and even new initiatives in the field of social security (Italy finally gained a universal health care system, for instance, and Kreisky extended health insurance and paid holidays in Austria). The conviction was still that 'democracy should be able to deliver social results and combat unemployment', as Palme stated, because 'in the long run, democracy cannot survive in countries which suffer from high unemployment for a long time'.¹⁷

But around the turn of the 1980s, also many politicians on the left started to ditch ambitions of far-reaching economic planning and began to hold extensive social security responsible for slow economic growth. This signalled a growing consensus of the peoples' parties on this perspective, epitomized by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, which published an at the time widely accepted report in 1981 in which it argued that spending on the welfare state was keeping back economic growth. The high tax rates necessary to sustain extensive welfare state provisions were blamed for limiting

¹² Club 89, *Une stratégie de gouvernement* (Paris: Albatros, 1985).

¹³ A. Juppé, *La double rupture. Redressement de l'économie, responsabilité pour chaque Français, liberté pour l'entreprise, confiance pour la France. Présentation Jacques Chirac* (Paris: FeniXX, 1983), 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁵ RPR, *Le nouveau. Pacte RPR pour la France* (Paris: RPR, 1986).

¹⁶ H. Kohl, 'Bericht der Parteivorsitzenden', in CDU, *Protokoll 23. Bundesparteitag CDU 23.-25.6.1976 Mannheim* (Bonn: CDU, 1976), 24-45: 31.

¹⁷ O. Palme, 'Die Lehren aus Deutschland gelten für uns alle' (1985), in O. Palme, *Er rührte an die Herzen der Menschen. Reden und Texte* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1986), 74-85: 79.

consumption and investment, while the provisions in themselves allegedly took away incentives for people to search for work. Such conclusions became broadly shared also because unemployment had become a major problem that classic Keynesian policies seemed unable to solve. Virtually everywhere it had stood at or below 2 per cent in the early 1970s, but a decade later figures had risen to 7 per cent in Germany and even 8 per cent or higher in Spain, France, and Italy.

With inflation still relatively high and unemployment figures escalating, the whole Keynesian perspective on how to tackle Europe's economic woes became suspect also on the left. People suddenly talked about the 'end of the social democrat century' and one Austrian SPÖ-Chancellor aptly summarized how many people saw the situation as follows: 'socialism = state, state = deficit, and deficit = socialism.'¹⁸ Politicians across the spectrum had the ambition to cut unemployment subsidies, enacted pension reforms to raise the retirement age, stimulated wage moderation, and tried to balance the government's books by scrapping social and cultural programmes. They also advocated the deregulation of financial systems, aimed to reduce subsidies to ailing industries, and wanted to reform the labour market to support competitiveness and labour mobility. Even if these plans were not executed at the same scale in Europe as they were in Britain or the US, a sea change, or *Tendenzwende*, and gusto for change was visible also among the electorate. In Sweden, the Socialists were ousted from government for the first time since 1936. In Germany, the CDU returned to power after thirteen years in opposition as Kohl became Chancellor, while the liberal Republican Party delivered Italy's first non-Christian Democrat premier since 1945. In Norway and Denmark, anti-tax Progress Parties had already achieved smashing victories at the polls in the preceding decade.

The changing tide was also visible in places where the left was in government. Here, too, the conception of the people's party was rethought and came to ever more strongly emphasize the parties' role to govern the market economy. In Austria, Kreisky displayed much flexibility in shifting from a Keynesian to a more neo-liberal perspective (although he was careful not to risk the social partnership) and steered the country through the crisis by more spending rigour.¹⁹ In Spain, González removed all remaining Marxist references from the party programme and side-lined any remaining orthodox members from the party ranks. He became premier in 1982 with the promise to solve Spain's economic

¹⁸ F. Vranitzky, 'Zwischen Prinzip Hoffnung und Endzeitstimmung' (interview with Iring Fetscher and Franz Vranitzky), in H. Tieber and E. Fröschl, eds, *Mut zur Hoffnung. Eine Dokumentation der Gespräche am Zukunftkongress der SPÖ Laxenburg 1987* (Vienna: SPÖ, 1987), 42–61: 48–50.

¹⁹ A. Pelinka, 'Die Ära Kreisky. Zur symbiotischen Adaptionsfähigkeit der Sozialdemokratie', in P. Pelinka and G. Steger, eds, *Auf dem Weg zur Staatspartei. Zu Geschichte und Politik der SPÖ seit 1945* (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1988), 57–65.

problems with wage moderation and the reduction of state spending, while creating more room for the private sector.²⁰ In Italy, the new PSI-leader Bettino Craxi became premier in 1983 on the ticket of the promise of far-reaching institutional and economic reform. He stated that ‘the utopia of the abolition of capitalism intended as point of arrival of the socialist transformation has led to an undervaluation of the problems that are important to determine the construction of a new society’.²¹ Moreover, Craxi stated that Italy could never have overcome the economic crisis ‘without the contribution of the Italian entrepreneurship, without the dynamism and commitment of the big and small enterprises’.²² He also warned that the welfare state had become too big and that the government’s aim to ‘want to give everything to everyone’ was no longer affordable.²³

But the biggest change of all took place in France. Here, Mitterrand won the 1981 presidential elections with a daring programme of social and economic reform that went against the grain of the neo-liberal times. In a careful balancing act, Mitterrand on the one hand tried to reassure moderate voters with the slogan of the PS as the *force tranquille* that would oversee a smooth transfer of power into the hands of the man that had accused De Gaulle and his constitution of ’58 as a ‘permanent coup d’état’. On the other hand, he promised sweeping social change and a ‘transition to socialism’ based on a programme with 110 propositions. Once elected, Mitterrand’s government delivered on its promises. While other governments practiced austerity, his government came to power ‘living in a Keynesian fiction’ as Mitterrand’s prime minister Pierre Mauroy later recalled.²⁴ Mitterrand enacted a Keynesian stimulus package, nationalized major banks and key companies so that over a fifth of industrial workers was now employed in state service, raised the minimum wage, and increased pensions. But already after sixteen months in power, Mitterrand showed the first signs of what was later referred to as a U-turn.²⁵ In a prophetic speech in Figeac, north of Toulouse, on the economic situation of France he stated that ‘socialism is not my bible. I must express all the sound opinions of the nation.’²⁶ After a few months, as the government devalued the *franc* for the third time since Mitterrand took office and France faced a

²⁰ D. Share, *Dilemmas of Social Democracy: The Spanish Socialist Workers Party in the 1980s* (London: Praeger, 1989).

²¹ B. Craxi, *L’alternativa dei socialisti. Il progetto del PSI presentato da Bettino Craxi* (Milan: Avanti, 1978), 31.

²² B. Craxi, *Una responsabilità democratica. Una prospettiva riformista per l’Italia che cambia. Relazione introduttiva al 44 Congresso, Rimini 31 marzo–5 aprile 1987* (Milan: Avanti, 1987), 16.

²³ B. Craxi, ‘Nell’interesse della nazione. Dichiarazioni programmatiche del Presidente del Consiglio alla Camera dei deputati e al Senato della Repubblica, 9 agosto 1983’, in U. Finetti, ed., *Il socialismo di Craxi. Interventi e documenti del PSI* (Milan: M&B, 2003), 227–39: 235.

²⁴ P. Mauroy, *Mémoires. ‘Vous mettez du bleu au ciel’* (Paris: Plon, 2003), 215.

²⁵ Bell and Criddle, *Exceptional Socialists*, 152–7.

²⁶ F. Mitterrand, ‘Allocution de M. François Mitterrand, Président de la République, notamment sur la stratégie économique industrielle et sociale du gouvernement face à la concurrence internationale, Figeac, place Vival, lundi 27 septembre 1982’. Found at <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/133607-allocution-de-m-francois-mitterrand-president-de-la-republique-notamm>.

mounting payment problem, it became clear what Mitterrand meant. His government made a U-turn, moving away from nationalizations.²⁷ It deregulated financial markets, cut down on social spending, and aimed to make France more competitive internationally. One year later, in a cabinet reshuffle, the Communists were ditched from the government and a new reformist premier Laurent Fabius took the lead. By that time, nothing remained of the French Socialists revolutionary ambitions. Privatizations (including sixty-five banks) became the new practice.

The U-turn of Mitterrand not only signalled the end of any remaining illusions to overcome capitalism among politicians of the European left. It also showed how even the PS, which ever since its founding, and even in the days of Blum and Mollet, had always had an ambivalent relationship with the exercise of government power, now also presented itself to the world as a responsible party of government. The function of the party organization was no longer to generate enthusiasm among the rank and file or to represent their interests. Instead, its purpose was in the first place to provide efficient, responsible, and effective government in times of economic hardship, to reform the postwar social and economic model which was now challenged from all sides and to provide what was widely referred to as 'governability'—the ability to govern efficiently both what seemed ungovernable societies with protests and strikes and a vast state apparatus.

The growing emphasis of politicians on their skills as crisis managers showed that with the shift away from planning as a socioeconomic perspective, the notion gained ground that government institutions, and the state's bureaucracy more generally, were unable to respond adequately to the social unrest of the time. On the request of the Trilateral Commission, one of the several multilateral commissions that emerged to analyse and address the crisis of the 1970s, three leading scholars produced an influential report characteristically called *The Crisis of Democracy*.²⁸ In it, they aired their concerns about an overload of demands being put on the state, precisely at a time of economic hardship. These demands included those of the social movements for more and novel ways of participation in political decision-making, those of lobby groups for specific legislation, those of environmentalist groups for nature preservation, consumer organizations for consumer protection, but also those of employees for better social security and housing. They all wanted a government that responded quickly and efficiently to their demands and that allowed them to participate in decision-making. But it seemed as if governments were increasingly unable to respond. According to Michel Crozier, the French sociologist who wrote the report's section on Western Europe, the 'crisis

²⁷ See on the U-turn: Bell and Criddle, *Exceptional Socialists*, 157; Bell, *Mitterrand*, 104–5; Bergounioux and Grunberg, *L'ambition et le remords*, 368–9.

²⁸ M. Crozier, S. P. Huntington, and J. Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy. On the Governability of Democracies* (New York: NYU Press, 1975).

of democracy' was therefore to a large extent a 'crisis of governability'. As a result of the parties' zeal for planning and management of the socioeconomic issues, the state had become slow, remote, and ineffective. Over the course of the postwar decades, parties raised ever higher expectations ('Make good times even better'), and now governments increasingly failed to live up to them.

In other words, the economic recession, mounting government debts, energy crises, and the inability to bring down rising unemployment figures led to a rethinking of what should be the purpose and scope of government action and, with it, of the role and purpose of the people's parties. The timing of this turnaround was vital. Just when social movements pressured party leaders to develop new ways of representation and inclusion in decision-making, the economic crisis required political parties to offer stable, cohesive, and effective government. The crisis atmosphere among party politicians was thus tangible, but also paradoxical. They were deeply aware of the fact that the people's parties were quickly losing support and that this potentially harboured major consequences for the legitimacy of democratic institutions at large. Not seldom, they viewed the crisis of their age through the perspective of that of the 1930s. Just like then, people like Palme, Brandt, and Kreisky believed, there was a combination of mounting social problems, difficulties to govern countries effectively, and growing anti-party sentiments among the electorate. Membership numbers of parties started to decline and feelings of fatigue with party politics became ever more apparent. This trend, many felt, could take democracy in the wrong direction. Politicians warned that history could repeat itself. Kohl even felt that:

[the] time when the Federal Republic as free democracy is being tested has begun. It is good to remember the lessons of Weimar. The Weimar republic lost the confidence of its citizens during the economic crisis. The parties of the constitution refused to collaborate and to lead. . . . In easy times it is easy to provide leadership. But when times become more difficult. . . then the capacity of parties and parliaments to include [the people] must show itself. Then politicians must say things as they are and do what is necessary, not what is desirable.²⁹

But at the same time, party leaders seemed unable to think of solutions to this crisis which went beyond the boundaries of what the people's party offered already. Thus they saw the role of the people's parties first and foremost as crucial in trying to solve the crisis of governability. Indeed, this emphasis on governability increasingly superseded efforts to address the changing ways citizens aimed to participate and be represented.

²⁹ Kohl, 'Grundsatzreden des Parteivorsitzenden', in *Mit der Jugend*, 29.

As 'governability' thus became the main purpose of the people's parties, the purpose of the party organization became increasingly to defend and explain government policy.³⁰ Of course, in different national circumstances governability as a new credo for party leaders played out differently. The SPD was proud of what it called the 'Model Germany' it allegedly offered, a social and political ideal which steered the country comparatively well through the economic crisis of the 1970s.³¹ The SPD therefore identified strongly with its government role and with the German state (it was 'state-friendly but lacked young people' as one critic called it). On this identity, it built its image: in the 1976 election campaign it even ditched the Socialist red for the colours of the German flag on its campaign posters. Four years later, Chancellor Helmut Schmidt talked at the election congress not so much about the party, but almost exclusively about the achievements of the government. Germany, he claimed 'has withstood the global recession and inflation, the oil and energy crisis much better than many other countries. Our currency is stable. . . . Our budget proves that we have the strength and courage to make the necessary domestic and international expenses and at the same time maintain keep our financial politics stable.'³² In other words, the party represented the alleged achievements of the German state and its financial policy to its party members, rather than the concerns of its members to those in government.

The CDU, on the other hand, took over from the SPD in 1982 and claimed it had to clean up the mess of thirteen years of SPD-administration. By the time Kohl took office, the 'Model Germany' looked indeed much less in shape—unemployment increased by 40 per cent on a yearly basis in both 1981 and 1982. The SPD, Kohl argued 'has failed as a government party... they have overburdened state finances and the economy and have taken our country in a crisis of orientation...'.³³ Throughout the decade, Kohl claimed that the CDU was the natural party of government in the country and that only they could provide the kind of effective government that Germany needed. But in doing so, they built their identity on the same aspects as the SPD had done before: they would bring the deficit down, generate economic growth, limit inflation, and reform (and trim) the bureaucracy.

In comparison with Italy, Germany's economic and 'governability' problems were still relatively small. Italy's public debt skyrocketed in the 1980s, reaching

³⁰ In this way, one could argue that parties no longer represented 'bottom up', but 'top down', see: M. Saward, 'Making Representations: Modes and Strategies of Political Parties', *European Review* 16.3 (2008), 271–86.

³¹ A. Rödder, 'Das "Modell Deutschland" zwischen Erfolgsgeschichte und Verfallsdiagnose', *Vierteljahrshäfte für Zeitgeschichte* 54.3 (2006), 345–63. See also: Sassoon, *One Hundred Years*, 510.

³² Speech of Helmut Schmidt at SPD, *Wahlparteitag Essen 9./10. Juni 1980. Protokoll* (Bonn: SPD, 1980), 33–4.

³³ H. Kohl, 'Rede des Vorsitzenden', in CDU, *Aufwärts mit Deutschland. Protokoll* 31. *Bundesparteitag 25.16 Mai 1983 Köln* (Bonn: CDU, 1983), 29–59: 32.

almost 100 per cent of GDP by the end of the decade. Corruption and inefficiency wasted a lot of public resources, reason for Berlinguer to raise what he called the 'moral question' and present the Communists as a clean alternative to the politicians in government. But this was not all. Italy also suffered from a long tradition of weak governments, a slow legislative process, and a traditionally ineffective bureaucracy.³⁴ Governability was about tackling these ills, and politicians reasoned that if they provided 'governability', the legitimacy of parties would also increase. So, the party leader of the DC, by then Arnaldo Forlani, claimed that 'all the activities of the party, its capacity to take initiatives and make proposals, should be aimed at making government action more efficient This has always been my conviction, and Craxi knows, namely that the parties of government find support with voters if they respond to the demands of government decisively.'³⁵

Although shared by the DC, the strongest advocate of the promise of governability was without doubt the PSI.³⁶ This party saw reforming a blocked political system and relieving the country of an allegedly ailing bureaucracy as its biggest possible contributions to Italian democracy. Governability increasingly defined the Socialist identity, because 'being a mass party does not mean that it should have maximum support. Mass party does not mean to distribute many membership cards' Rather, 'the PSI is a government party . . . whether it is in government or opposition the party should have a structure of government'.³⁷ Craxi put these aspirations into practice. As premier, on the one hand, he emphasized the same kind of achievements as Schmidt and Kohl, seeing his contribution to steering Italy's democracy through the crisis in management terms and identifying strongly with the government. The party provided 'stability, governability, renewal, reform and all in a coherent way'. On the other hand, he continuously talked in negative terms about the state and contradicted it with a vibrant civil society: 'Italian society has proven these years an enormous dynamism, vitality, creativity. But the state has not been able to keep up. Society is quick. The state is slow.'³⁸ There was therefore urgently need for a *grande riforma* to achieve the desired level of governability, quicker legislative process, and more political stability. This should then result in what Craxi called a *democrazia governante*, a democracy that was able to govern. Craxi installed a Bicameral Commission which should come up with a blueprint of institutional reforms, but this led to nothing.

Derived of both Marxism and Keynesianism, Socialist politicians found a new purpose in this emphasis on their governmental role. It filled the void that the

³⁴ P. McCarthy, *The Crisis of the Italian State. From the Origins of the Cold War to the Fall of Berlusconi* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997).

³⁵ A. Forlani, 'Forte iniziativa della Democrazia cristiana in stretto raccordo col governo', in DC, *Atti del XVIII Congresso Nazionale della Democrazia Cristiana*, Vol. 2: *Il Dibattito* (Rome: Edizione Cinque Lune, 1982), 107–27: 111, 119.

³⁶ Mattera, *Storia del PSI*, 199–215.

³⁷ Tamburrano, 'Il PSI dopo la scissione', 862.

³⁸ B. Craxi, 'L'Italia verso L'Europa. Relazione e replica al 45. Congresso di Verona, 13–19 maggio 1989', in B. Craxi, *Relazioni e repliche congressuali 1978–1989* (Milan: Avanti, 1989), 24.

dropping of their other ideological points of reference left behind.³⁹ 'Modernization', 'reformism', and 'responsibility' were other key words with which people like Craxi, Kreisky, and Mitterrand expressed their quest for governability. Modernization was also key for the new French premier Laurent Fabius, who, in the spirit of Craxi, argued that 'it is vital that France adopts a new practice of the role of the state', because people 'tell us that they no longer want a distant, indifferent, bureaucratic state'.⁴⁰ The purpose of the party was to support the government in its task of reforming the state—in France mainly with the instrument of decentralization of powers from Paris to the regions. With such reforms of the state as their main purpose in government, the atmosphere at the party congresses of the PS in the 1980s was radically different than that of even only a few years before.⁴¹ Gone was the identification with the extra-parliamentary left, the anti-capitalist rhetoric, and the suspicion against any kind of authority—most of all those invested in the government and the president of the republic. In its place came concern with how the party could support its ministers, so that there was a 'synthesis between our proposals and government action'.⁴² The party should better 'explain' government policy, on every level. It should also ensure that the 'local politician is an important agent of explanation and information about government politics and the role of the party. The local politicians should be a reliable intermediate between government, party, and people.'⁴³

In tackling the economic crisis, unemployment, inflation, and bloating government debt, party leaders thus displayed a remarkable paradox. They went along with the neo-liberal tendency to criticize the state, allegedly too large, slow, inefficient, and wasteful to solve the issues of ordinary citizens. Party leaders even found their own new purpose in making the state 'governable' once again. But while they thus displayed a certain aversion against (big) government, they considered themselves vital in launching the reform of government. And this paradoxically meant that they identified strongly with their role in government and seemingly un-partisan and 'post-ideological' aims such as low inflation, efficient government, and a small and well-functioning bureaucracy that came with it.

So paradoxically the aim to reform the state and pursue 'governability' led to an even stronger identification of parties with the state's interest, and an even

³⁹ The key study on the reinvention of the left in neo-liberal direction remains Mudge, *Leftism Reinvented*, esp. ch. 8.

⁴⁰ L. Fabius, 'Moderniser et rassembler. Discours d'investiture 17 juin 1984', in L. Fabius, *Le Cœur du Futur* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1985), 49–62: 54.

⁴¹ Bergounioux and Grunberg, *L'ambition et le remords*, 334ff.

⁴² 'Motion nationale d'orientation', Congrès de Toulouse 11, 12, 13 Octobre 1985, *Le Poing et la Rose*, 11, 12, 13 Octobre 1985, 5–17: 16. Found at <https://archives-socialistes.fr/app/photopro.sk/archives/detail?docid=208018>.

⁴³ Lionel Jospin at the Congress of Bourg-en-Bresse, PS, 'Le congrès de Bourg-en-Bresse', *Le Poing et la Rose. Contributions au débat, congrès de Bourg-en-Bresse, 28, 29, 30 octobre 1983*, 12. Found at <https://archives-socialistes.fr/app/photopro.sk/archives/detail?docid=207427>.

stronger claim to represent the general interest than before. 'We must praise the search for compromise in all situations', Mitterrand explained at a breakfast meeting with journalists in 1984. His aide Jacques Attali was even more explicit, stating that the purpose of the government was 'to leave for the opposition not a bone to pick, nothing with which it could oppose us'.⁴⁴ Mitterrand hid his Socialist-party card as much as possible in the presential elections of 1988 (which he fought against his own prime minister Chirac). Instead, he wrote a 'letter to all French' in which he claimed that 'I do not want to present a programme to you, a programme is the affair of parties' (he also, in another striking contrast with 1981, stated that 'the health of our economy largely depends on the health of our enterprises').⁴⁵ Likewise, the SPÖ held a series of discussion meetings about its own future at the end of the 1980s and concluded that 'in our understanding of politics there no longer exists an absolute and unshakable political end goal'. This meant that the party 'understands itself as the representative of society as a whole, a forum where many individual initiatives meet'.⁴⁶

With parties ever less concerned with representing or organizing their members and ever more with providing 'governability', the work of their officials and representatives also changed. Their role was less to rally the rank and file and much more to canvass support in elections and sustain the party's efforts in management of its governmental tasks. One such party official left an intimate testimony of what this change looked like from the inside: Mario Chiesa.⁴⁷ Chiesa was a hospital manager and local Milanese politician and later the first suspect in a major political corruption scandal that rocked Italian politics in the early 1990s. In an extensive interview looking back on his broken political career he recalled the transformation of the Italian Socialist party in the 1980s.

Chiesa remembered when he became Socialist section leader in the early 1970s 'the doctors, nurses and porters voted for me. The membership cards, about 40, were paid by the members. The work, including attaching party posters, was done by everyone, including me. I was not invested from above [in the party ranks].' In other words, the PSI was still largely a party rooted in society and organized from below. This all changed, in Chiesa's view, after Craxi reformed the party, launched his battle for governability, became premier, and his party (and Craxi's brother as mayor in the first place) took control over the government of Milan's city council (and many others). By then, the PSI had become completely dominated by its achievements in government, and Chiesa's understanding of his job changed

⁴⁴ Cited with D. Singer, *Is Socialism Doomed? The Meaning of Mitterrand* (Oxford: Singer, 1988), 197.

⁴⁵ F. Mitterrand, *Lettre à tous les Français* (Paris, 1988), 3, 23. Found at https://www.mitterrand.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/pdf_lettre_a_tous_les_francais_f-mitterrand1988.pdf.

⁴⁶ SPÖ, *Sozialdemokratie. Vorschläge zur Diskussion über Österreichs Zukunft* (Vienna: SPÖ, 1989), 3, 95.

⁴⁷ See also Musella, *Il Potere della Politica*, 170.

accordingly. 'From the early 1980s', Chiesa recalled, 'the militants left, and the clients entered... in a few years we underwent a genetical transformation. There were ever less companions ready to organize parties and distribute *Avanti* [the party newspaper]...'. The purpose of a mid-level politician like Chiesa became to get things done for the party's clients from its control over (local) government, for entrepreneurs and directors of public companies. The purpose of the party was to govern. The few militants that were left were even physically removed from the party's business in government, which now gained full priority. 'Also I took a private office, in via Castelfidardo', Chiesa recalled, 'far from Quarto Oggiaro [the local party section]. The transformation from a party of militants into a party of clients made this necessary. The section, even though normal and run by party militants, is not the right place for a certain kind of politics.'⁴⁸

This 'certain kind of politics' of the Milanese Socialists eventually also turned out to include the kind of illicit deals of awarding public contracts in exchange for cash which soon came under scrutiny of public prosecutors. It was certainly not a necessary but still one possible consequence of the increased orientation of parties on the government. Party political corruption was perhaps more evasive in Italy than elsewhere, but the country was no exception. The German press revealed that the large industrial Flick holding made payments worth twenty-five million D-mark to all political parties represented in parliament in return for favourable tax legislation in the 1980s. In France, around the same time, several corruption scandals involving the awarding of government contracts in exchange for party financing, both locally and nationally and affecting both the Socialists and the RPR, dominated newspaper headlines.

Politicians rightly feared that such scandals tainted their credentials and undermined public trust in parties and democracy further. They often responded with legislation that introduced direct public funding of parties. This was a way to improve the dire straits of party finances and protect parties against (allegations of) being under the influence of big business. But direct funding also perfectly fit the narrative that became so dominant in the 1970s and 1980s, namely that parties occupied such important state and government functions that it seemed almost natural that they were funded by the state as well.⁴⁹ Therefore, from Sweden to Italy and Belgium and France, legislation with direct funding was made precisely in these decades (Germany preceded this slightly with its party law enacted in 1967) and the reasons that politicians gave for this were very similar across the borders: such legislation sanctioned the pivotal function of parties in governing modern democracies. They therefore all attacked anti-party critics as anti-democrats,

⁴⁸ M. Andreoli, *Andavamo in piazza Duomo. Nella testimonianza di Mario Chiesa* (Milan: Sperling, 1993), 19, 29, 33.

⁴⁹ I. van Biezen, 'Political Parties as Public Utilities', *Party Politics* 10.6 (2004), 701–22.

because, as one leading SPD-politician argued in parliament, ‘we can recognize the enemies of democracy today... we can recognize them because they are against political parties, against the [public] financing of political parties’.⁵⁰

Just as the changes in party democracy in the 1920s and 1950s had been commented on by earlier generations of party scholars like Neumann and Kirchheimer, this trend of parties to move ever closer to the state was also observed (and harshly criticized) by the most esteemed party scholar of this time. Peter Mair observed the emergence of a new party type. After the mass (or integration) party of the Interwar period and the catch-all party of the 1950s and 1960s, his own age increasingly saw the transformation of parties into what he called ‘cartel parties’. As there were hardly any parties of structural opposition left, all parties were potentially government parties and thus limited their competition. No major party was ever really ‘out’ of government, Mair observed (echoing what many politicians themselves had noticed in the previous two decades). They were consequently focused much more on the state than on society, which meant that, for Mair, the state was ‘invaded’ by parties, which had even become ‘semi-state agencies’. With the state and among themselves they formed a ‘cartel’ that blocked potential challengers while they divided the spoils of government.⁵¹

For Mair, it was the decline in members (and their financial contributions) which drove parties towards the state. The ‘invasion’ of the state was therefore, for him, most of all visible in the laws that introduced the direct state funding of parties. However, in reality, even in the golden age of the mass party, no party could survive on membership fees alone. All kinds of indirect state subsidies had for a long time been in practice.⁵² Moreover, while parties were certainly more oriented on the state than before, this orientation was not primarily financial nor necessarily negative. Direct public subsidies were also an expression of the emphasis on government responsibility that parties had made more dominant since the Second World War, even rendering parties ‘public utilities’.⁵³ Indeed, the president of the commission that drafted the French party finance law of 1988 claimed that the law ‘recognizes the function of parties as participants *in a sort of public service* to universal suffrage’.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Adolf Arndt at the Deutscher Bundestag, 5. Wahlperiode, 116 Sitzung, Bonn Mittwoch, 28 Juni 1967, 5802. See on the introduction of public subsidies for parties also: P. Corduener, ‘Institutionalizing the Democratic Party-State: Political Parties as “Public Utilities” in Italy and West Germany, 1945–1975’, *European Review of History/Revue Européenne d’histoire*, 25, 1 (2018), 101–120.

⁵¹ Katz and Mair, ‘Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy’. See also R. S. Katz and P. Mair, ‘The Cartel Party Theory: A Restatement’, *Perspectives on Politics* 7.4 (2009), 753–66.

⁵² Corduener, ‘Democracy and the Entanglement of Political Parties and the State’, 54–5.

⁵³ Van Biezen, ‘Political Parties as Public Utilities’.

⁵⁴ Jean-Pierre Delalande at De la République Française, Assemblée nationale, Constitution du 4 Octobre 1958, 8e Législature, Deuxième session extraordinaire de 1987–1988 (1re séance), compte rendu intégral, 1re séance du mardi 2 février 1988, 16. My emphasis. See also Yves-Marie Doublet, *Le financement de la vie politique* (Paris, 1990).

Mair noted that the challenges to the 'cartel party' seemed to come most of all from the far right. All over Europe, far-right parties emerged and made electoral headways in the 1980s in what with the benefit of hindsight was the onset of the populist wave of the 1990s and later. The Front National of Jean-Marie Le Pen in France made its first electoral breakthrough at the French parliamentary elections of 1986, catching 10 per cent of the vote. In the same year, Jörg Haider took control of the Freedom Party Austria and gave the party a new anti-immigrant and anti-establishment identity. Here, too, soon one in ten people voted for the FPÖ. Far-right parties such as the Centre Democrats in the Netherlands and the Flemish Bloc in Belgium entered parliament too. And Italy saw the establishment of the Northern League, although this was initially not so much a party of the far right, but one which advocated autonomy of the richer northern regions.⁵⁵

For all these new parties, denouncing the people's parties and their allegedly intimate relationship with each other and the government was central to their political programme. The Front National talked continuously about the 'regime, the system, the establishment, the political class, the cast' and even about the 'gang of four' with which it denoted the four major parties.⁵⁶ Just as the FN called for a 'Sixth Republic' to break the power of party elites, Haider targeted the *Proporzstaat* and called for a Third Republic to overcome the hold of the SPÖ and ÖVP on power in Austria. The way these parties controlled the political and social system of the country allegedly stifled free debate and limited the influence of ordinary citizens on decision-making. Likewise, Lega-leader Umberto Bossi's aversity against the southern half of the country seamlessly flowed into critique against the parties and their intimate relation with the state. He denounced what he called *Roma Ladrona*, Rome the 'thief' that was allegedly living as a parasite on northern taxpayers' money and stated that 'the parties are just an instrument with which southerners control the state'. He came to parliament wearing a tie that depicted a cartoon of himself eating the *partitocrazia*.

Established party politicians at times scorned the critique of these newcomers. Just as the SPD had spoken with disdain of the Greens, party politicians in government now talked dismissively about the new movements on the right. Craxi called the League 'a typical phenomenon of extremism, of protest, of a state of *malessere*, of frustration'. These feelings might have some legitimate base in a malfunctioning state, but they, he implied, could only be solved by the ruling parties.⁵⁷ The PS displayed a similar confidence in its own crucial role in a circular to its militants on 'how to battle the Front National'. It claimed that 'to fight

⁵⁵ G. Passarelli and D. Tuorto, 'From the Lega Nord to Salvini's League: Changing Everything to Change Nothing?', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 27.3 (2022), 400–15.

⁵⁶ Cited with J. Shields, 'The Front National: From Systemic Opposition to Systemic Integration', *Modern and Contemporary France* 22.4 (2014), 491–511: 494.

⁵⁷ Intervention of Bettino Craxi at the party congress of 1991: PSI, *Riunire i socialisti, rinnovare la Repubblica. Atti del 46. Congresso di Bari 27–30 Giugno 1991* (Milan: PSI, 1991), 22.

against the Front National, the PS, the main force on the Left and the first party in France, is an exceptional instrument'.⁵⁸

Still, the critique of these populist newcomers against the people's parties for being more concerned with governing than voicing the concerns of citizens could not simply be dismissed as the rhetoric of far-right politicians. It was also increasingly observed by people's party politicians and observers close to them. Also they warned that the focus on governability eroded the support and legitimacy of the people's parties. Invited at a conference of the DC, the director of the Italian Institute for Social Studies (CENSIS) noted that 'the party has become ever more a government body . . . its point of reference is not society, but government, power, governability'. This was in his view problematic, because 'the modern party, born to launch new projects, ends by following the logics of government'.⁵⁹ One critical DC politician noted a 'gradual and dangerous metamorphosis' of the party 'often refusing to express society and to assume almost the connotations and functions of an organ of the state'.⁶⁰ This tendency was particularly strong in Italy, with its lack of real government alternation. But it was certainly not limited to here. It was even voiced inside the SPD. One prominent SPD-politician explained the party's 'loss of voters and the loss of identity' by pointing to the 'exclusive orientation of parties on the power of the state'. The party almost exclusively seemed to be composed of 'those who exercise government functions, aim to exercise government functions, or have exercised government functions'. He also warned, just like his Italian contemporaries, that 'the party is being consumed so much by its government tasks at local, regional, and national level that it takes over the logic of civil servants, bureaucracy, coalitions completely and cannot think about alternatives'.⁶¹

By the end of the 1980s, concerns about this tendency were running so high that even leaders felt forced to speak out. The future German president Von Weizsäcker stated that the growing 'gap' between citizens and parties posed a huge risk to the security of democracy, and the answer parties gave to this challenge 'decides not only the future of parties, but the destiny of democracy as such'. The blame for the gap lay with parties, whose politicians 'erased the dividing line between state and parties' and 'have captured the state like a prey'.⁶² He later

⁵⁸ PS, *Comment lutter contre le Front National?* (Paris: PS, 1988), 55.

⁵⁹ G. de Rita, 'Nuovi modelli della mediazione politica e struttura di partito', in *La democrazia cristiana degli anni 80 tra crisi dei partiti e domande della società civile. Atti del Seminario di Studio organizzato dal Dipartimento Cultura Scuola e Formazione della Direzione Centrale della D.C. Roma 9-11 aprile 1981* (Rome: Edizione Cinque Lune, 1981), 79-91: 88, 89

⁶⁰ S. Fontana, 'Lo strumento partito', in G. Bianco, C. Donat-Cattin, and S. Fontana, eds, *Terza Fase. Crisi dei partiti, crisi della D.C.* (Florence, 1981), 38-60: 44. See on the self-critique inside the DC also: A. Giovagnoli, *Il partito italiano. La Democrazia cristiana dal 1942 al 1994* (Bari: Laterza, 1996), 169-70.

⁶¹ P. Glötz, *Die Beweglichkeit des Tankers. Die Sozialdemokratie zwischen Staat und neue soziale Bewegungen* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1982), 33-4.

⁶² R. von Weizsäcker, *Krise und Chance der Parteiendemokratie. Vortragsreihe der Robert Bosch Stiftung* (Stuttgart: Robert Bosch Stiftung, 1982), 10.

repeated those words even more forcefully as federal president. Likewise, in his annual Christmas address in 1987, broadcast live on TV and watched by millions, the Italian president Francesco Cossiga stated that the growing sentiment of a democratic crisis called on parties 'to the task, first of all, to renewal, from the inside, of a system that should continue to be the pillar of political liberty. The idea that parties limit their function to merely the exercise of power, with all the temptations that come from it, should quickly stop and lead to the re-discovery of another role, namely that of organizing the presence of citizens in the state.'⁶³ The parties answered with a new initiative called the 'open party'.

⁶³ F. Cossiga, *Messaggio di fine anno del presidente della Repubblica agli italiani*, 31 dicembre 1987. Found at <https://archivio.quirinale.it/discorsi-bookreader//discorsi/Cossiga.html#page/714/mode/2up>.

The 'Open Party' and Its Limits in the 1980s

The German youth subculture of the early 1980s seemed to contrast everything that the CDU stood for. It featured youngsters with white anarchist symbols painted on the back of their black leather jackers, squatters who occupied graffitied housing blocks in city centres, and the invention of punk music at the pub Ratinger Hof in downtown Düsseldorf. It was captured in the images of demonstrators who burned American flags to protest the stationing of US missiles on German territory and in those of young environmental protesters who defied what they called the *Atommafia* that planned to build a nuclear power station in the idyllic countryside around the small town of Wiehl. Although obviously far from representing all the German youth, the alternative youth movement had a large cultural impact at the time and still colours memories of the age. German youngsters, in other words, were not the most obvious crowd anyone would expect at the CDU Party congress of 1981, where the party presented itself once again as the face of respectable and bourgeois Germany, continued to stress its loyalty to the US, and highlighted the need of nuclear energy for the country. Indeed, Kohl made clear that he was deeply concerned about many young people 'who have made scepticism, rejection and refusal to a life principle'. Previously, this might have been enough reason for party elites to complacently share their disapproval and leave it at that. However, now concerns about the disconnection between the party and society were reason for Kohl to remind everyone that 'we must also remain in conversation with these fellow citizens'.¹ The party invited 500 young people to Hamburg to attend the party's annual conference. Importantly, these invitees were not adherents of the youth wing of the party. They had no formal connection to the CDU. It was, however, Kohl asserted, crucial that the party connected to them.

The Christian Democrats aimed to reach out to groups that felt they no longer had a share in party politics by listening to their views and trying to speak their language. Kohl emphasized that he supported the peace movement (although he

¹ H. Kohl, 'Grundsatzreden des Parteivorsitzenden', in CDU, *Mit der Jugend. Unser Land braucht einen neuen Anfang. Protokoll 30 Bundesparteitag 2–5 November 1981 Hamburg* (Bonn: CDU, 1981), 28–56: 46.

quickly added that 'peace without weapons' could not exist),² while it also announced to support the work of Amnesty International. But connecting to people outside the party required more than listening or paying tribute to themes that they cared about. The decision to invite non-members to the party conference showed that the party no longer simply aimed to convince like-minded people to join. Rather, the party aimed to engage with those outside party ranks much more seriously—even with people who would never aspire to join the party at all. A few years later, the CDU repeated the effort and invited 500 non-affiliated women to its party congress, this time to listen to their issues and represent their specific concerns.

The CDU's initiative to emphasize the importance it attached to women, the young, peace, and the environment did not stand on itself. This chapter shows how all the people's parties shared this aspiration to become what they called 'open parties'. The 'open party' was the most ambitious answer of party elites to confront the increasingly evident loss of popular support. It was also the most far-reaching attempt to redefine their relationship with citizens since the 'integration party' of six decades before. Concerned by the loss of members, party leaders shifted away from integration and inclusion of citizens inside party wings to opening the party to society as a whole. This counted for the RPR of Chirac, who stated that it would be the party's task to facilitate the quest for more participation that so many people in French society expressed.³ It counted for the ÖVP, whose leader stated at the same time of the CDU's congress that it was time 'that politics are made again *with* citizens, which takes citizens seriously' and would allow 'initiatives of citizens' and 'democratic co-decision'.⁴ And it counted for the Socialist parties too, with a flood of new initiatives taken by the PS, the PSI, and the SPD. However, while the 'open party' came with a few real reforms, for instance quotas for women in leading positions, its ultimate effect was limited. By the end of the 1980s, it even seemed as if the aspiration to open parties to society had produced the contrary effect: by being 'open', the people's parties seemed to confirm that they were increasingly superfluous as a means of political participation. So while intended to solidify popular participation from below as one of the three people's party pillars, the initiative of the open party further eroded it—and weakened the people's party as a political model.

The open party was a belated response of political elites to the new forms of civic participation and the disintegration of their classic working-class and confessional support base. The social movement activism of the decade questioned the whole

² Ibidem, 49.

³ J. Chirac, *La lueur de l'espérance. Réflexions du soir pour le matin* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1978), 28.

⁴ Erhard Busek, quoted in R. Kriechbaumer, 'Programme und Programmdiskussionen', in Kriechbaumer and Schausberger, eds, *Volkspartei*, 103–36: 127.

idea that 'party citizens' were a privileged political group, as some political thinkers explicitly, and many politicians implicitly, had argued in the postwar decades. They also showed that people had ever more fluid political loyalties and identities and that these did not necessarily conform to those of one of the people's parties. With so many other options available to become politically involved, party membership became ever less of a given, and increasingly something many citizens considered outdated. While all parties saw fluctuations in their membership numbers before, the decline of their members now was structural and affected all parties together. The SPD lost 100,000 members between 1976 and 1981 alone. The CDU and the SPÖ topped that same year and began their decline. The Dutch Labour Party lost about a quarter of its members in the early 1980s. And in Italy, the decline for the once proud mass parties in Italy was particularly grave, although they did much to conceal it. An internal report of the DC noted in 1976 that:

no one can be sure today how many members the DC has. The final data are from March, based on the conference of 1975. The membership number then stood at just above 1.8 million. Real or fake [members]? More fake than real. At Piazza del Gesù [the DC headquarters] and Piazza Nicosia where the Roman section is, they are convinced that if we would do an authentic count of the 90,000 members that are in the books in Rome 30,000 would remain, two-thirds less. And the same would probably happen in Naples, in Palermo. Fake membership cards, invented names, just taken from the phone book.⁵

Because many ordinary members turned their back on political parties one of the three pillars of the people's party started to crumble: their claim to represent the people from below and offer an important, perhaps even the most crucial, vehicle for citizens to become politically involved. The consequences for the legitimization of the model of people's party democracy were serious: if the people's parties no longer managed to enthuse their members and rally prospective voters inside their organizations, how could they possibly legitimize democracy from below?

Around the turn of the 1980s party leaders realized that they urgently needed to find new ways to reconnect to citizens and reform their organizations. This realization came first in Italy, where the social and political tensions of the 1970s had arguably run deeper than elsewhere.⁶ Party elites seemed ever less able to channel these social tensions and control their traditional supporters,

⁵ Archivio Democrazia Cristiana, Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Rome, DC UC SPES/TES SC. 16, Fasc. 4.

⁶ The literature on the crisis of party democracy in Italy starting in the 1970s is quite extensive. See for instance G. Orsina, 'Party Democracy and Its Enemies: 1945-1992', *Journal of Modern European History* 17.2 (2020), 220-33; S. Lupo, *Partito e antipartito. Una storia politica della prima Repubblica 1946-1978* (Rome: Donzelli 2004).

whether visible in the way voters defied the advice of the DC and legalized both abortion and divorce by referendum or the losing grip of Socialist and Communist parties on workers who went on wildcat strikes. Parliament was shaken up by newcomers that managed to break through voting patterns which had benefited the Socialist, Communist, and Christian Democrat parties, such as the lists put forward by the extra-parliamentary left and the success of the Radical Party which campaigned for civil rights. An influential group of Italian intellectuals started to exchange ideas on what they called 'the crisis of the mass party' in the Socialist magazine *Mondoperaio*.⁷ They concluded that the electorate was now increasingly 'without loyalty to or stable identification with a party'.⁸ They suspected that this 'loss of representativeness of mass parties' was related to the fact that 'parties have continued to organize themselves based on their respective social groups'.⁹ These organizations no longer corresponded to the increasingly individualized and fluid social structures of the late 1970s. The main question was therefore 'how to project on the party a model that is not that of the mass party but instead wants to reflect *a party of participation*?' That meant 'externally, to break down the walls of formal subscription for the party... and internally to overturn the traditional role of the bureaucrats and militants'.¹⁰

Such ideas to move beyond the organizational model of the mass party echoed in the PSI, which was particularly badly affected by the crisis of membership support. No one articulated their urgency more clearly than the new PSI-leader Bettino Craxi himself.¹¹ The PSI was 'behind its times, insensible to the new directions, disconnected from civil society, closed and oligarchical', Craxi already argued in 1966, when he was only a prominent local Milanese politician. The future of the party depended on its 'capacity to connect our political action with the large social movements, their quality and variety are proof of a huge re-awakening of political consciousness and of a delay of the traditional instruments of democratic life, in particular parties'.¹² Drawing on his experience in the student movement and communal politics, Craxi was elected party leader in 1976 on an eccentric ticket despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that he consistently told party elites that they were out of touch with the views of ordinary citizens. The party needed, he argued, to mirror social movements, 'spontaneous

⁷ For the transformation of the PSI in more detail see: P. Corduener, 'The Italian Socialist Party and the Crisis of Party Democracy: The Transformation of the Italian Socialists', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 28, 2 (2023), 205–19.

⁸ A. Panebianco, 'Una risposta alla crisi del partito di massa', *Mondoperaio* 4 (1979), 85–90: 88.

⁹ M. Fedele, 'I partiti di massa in una società laica', *Mondoperaio* 11 (1979), 103–8: 107.

¹⁰ G. Carbone, 'Modello di partito e progetto socialista', *Mondoperaio* 4 (1979), 95–101: 100.

¹¹ S. Colarizi and M. Gervasoni, *La cruna dell'ago. Craxi, il partito socialista e la crisi della Repubblica* (Bari: Laterza, 2005), 91–2.

¹² B. Craxi, *L'unità socialista. Rapporto politico organizzativo ai quadri tenuto dal Segretario della Federazione milanese del PSI 24 settembre 1966* (Milan: Avanti, 1967), 8.

associations, leagues, collectives, cultural initiatives... that can enrich the patrimony of socialism'.¹³ Indeed, the party 'should consider itself ever more a structure that synthesizes different experiences and is oriented towards the outside world, connected to expressions of associations and autonomous participation'.¹⁴ With this aim, the PSI ditched some of its old symbols (the hammer and sickle on the flag were replaced with a flower), abolished the Marxist 'Central Committee' that still steered the party, and emphasized to be open to all kinds of social initiatives, also those of the non-working-class kind.

Pioneered among Italian Socialists, the idea of the 'open party' also emerged elsewhere, for instance with the DC.¹⁵ Just as the PSI aimed to look for new social alliances, the DC confidently stated that by renewing its ties with society, the party 'has started a process of self-correction', which also meant that it looked beyond the Church as its most privileged social partner. 'In that sense', it continued, there was a 'new DC: an "open party" for an "open society"'. This has consequences for us, mainly for the young and women. Because the situation that politicians confront today is not that many young are in disarray, but that they are in disarray in the parties.'¹⁶ In France, the idea of the open party made inroads with the Gaullists in the final years of the UDR and was taken over by Chirac's RPR.¹⁷ But the PS, and especially Rocard, put this agenda forward most energetically. Just as for Craxi and the others, Rocard realized that the crisis of party membership was not temporary and not limited to one party. He intervened at the PS congress of 1978 with a stark warning. Here, he stated that 'political parties—and the PS does not escape this trend—are today too much cut off from the daily concerns of the French'. This could only be remedied 'by strengthening ties with new forms of social life, together with unions, associations, social movements that act on the ground.... The party should be *an image of society*'.¹⁸

Over the next few years, the PS-elite embraced this ambition to be an 'image of society' rather than of the working people and abandoned its traditional aim of convincing society to adopt the Socialist ideas of the party. This was especially urgent when the Socialists after 1981 were in government. The new secretary of the party, Mitterrand's *confident* Lionel Jospin, emphasized the need to 'show that the party is open, open to discussion, in touch with day-to-day problems ordinary

¹³ B. Craxi, *Per un polo socialista. Nell'unità delle forze progressiste. Discorso pronunciato al 40 congresso del PSI* (Rome: PSI, 1976), 12, 27.

¹⁴ B. Craxi, *Per una politica di unità nazionale, per l'unità e il rinnovamento del Partito', La relazione del Segretario del Partito al 41 Congresso del PSI* (Rome: PSI, 1978) 60, 74–5.

¹⁵ L. B. Gazzoli, *I quadri intermedi e l'organizzazione di un partito di massa* (Rome: Casa Editrice Libreria La Goliardica, 1977), 89.

¹⁶ F. Piccoli, 'Un grande partito di popolo per una rinnovativa iniziative di pace, di libertà e di solidarietà sociale', in DC, *Atti del 15 congresso nazionale della democrazia cristiana* (Rome: Edizione Cinque Lune, 1982), 61–84: 70, 72.

¹⁷ Pozzi, *Les mouvements gaullistes*, 313–20.

¹⁸ M. Rocard, 'Un puissant parti socialiste', in Rocard, *Parler vrai*, 163–9: 165–6. My emphasis.

people'.¹⁹ This was an important shift in how the PS viewed their relationship with society. When in the past parties in general, and the Socialist party in particular, lost members or elections, this usually resulted in the promise to stay truer to their own ideological traditions. Now, Jospin stated, even 'if it is *en vogue* to question the role of parties in democracy', this showed that 'forms of political engagement are changing' and this meant that the PS should change too. 'The forms of its organization' of the party should be 'flexible', its debates 'open and diverse' and it should demonstrate 'its capacity to modernize its own organization'.²⁰ In other words, the party that had to adapt its message and organization to reflect the openness of society in the 1980s.

Even the SPD, as oldest and once proudest mass party of Europe, joined in this trend. It wrote a programmatic update in 1975 in which there was already plenty of talk about this new kind of openness. The update, prosaically called 'Window on Orientation '85', fell short of a proper new programme, but was the first serious rethinking of Social democratic principles and strategies since Godesberg in 1959.²¹ The SPD now renounced the final remnants of its legacy as a mass party, concluding that 'the strategy of democratic socialism cannot be carried by the party alone'. The idea of the 'open party' gained ground as it noticed that 'part of the party—including its political education—must be opened and be open to citizens who are not party members, but who are interested in what the party does'. It was therefore the task of the party activists to have 'open conversations and collaborations with societal groups. Because the social, cultural, and economic environment of the old labour movement in which the SPD was rooted has structurally changed, the party needs a broader anchoring in today's society by means of a collaboration of a variety of social groups'.²²

The SPD's efforts to connect to a society that sought new ways of political participation gained new urgency after some of the environmental movements and 'citizens initiatives' of that decade formed 'civic lists' at local elections. In January 1980, these met in Karlsruhe to establish the Greens, a party which campaigned successfully on all themes which had sprung from the social movements of the past decade: peace, protection of the environment, and grass-roots democracy. The Greens branded themselves as an anti-party party and promised to depart from the practices of the people's parties in words and deed.²³

¹⁹ 'Intervention of Lionel Jospin at the Congrès de Bourg-en-Bresse, 28, 29, 30 October 1983', in *Le Poing et la Rose. Le congrès de Bourg-en-Bresse 28, 29, 30 Octobre 1983*, 3. Found at <https://archives-socialistes.fr/themes/archives/static/pdfviewer/?docid=207702&language=fra>.

²⁰ PS, 'Motion nationale d'orientation. Congrès de Toulouse, 17.

²¹ Lösche and Walter, *Die SPD*, 116.

²² SPD, SPD Parteitag 1975 Mannheim, 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft A. OR '85—Der Staat in der parlamentarischen Demokratie', in SPD, *Angenommen und überwiesene Anträge ökonomisch-politischer Orientierungsrahmen für die Jahre 1975–1985* (Bonn: SPD, 1975), 1061–2.

²³ S. Mende, 'Nichts recht, nichts links, sondern vorn'. *Eine Geschichte der Gründungsgrünen* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2011); P. Hockenos, *Joschka Fischer and the Making of the Berlin Republic. An Alternative History of Postwar Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

And it practised many of the open party initiatives without labelling them as such. For instance, it promoted transparency by inviting the press to internal meetings, was strongly decentralized to allow as many adherents as possible to participate in decision-making and put a limit on consecutive mandates of elected politicians to avoid the formation of a political elite. As such, it claimed to be a 'social movement party' that stayed true to the spontaneity of the civic initiatives that stood at its cradle.

The SPD saw the Greens as an electoral threat—confirmed when the Greens entered the national parliament in 1983—and Socialist politicians often commented on them with disdain. But the SPD saw the Greens also as inspiration to further renew their own organization along the lines of the open party which had tentatively been articulated before. Indeed, the SPD took this challenge to open the party to society rather far. A party commission on organizational reform concluded that 'the opening of the party to non-members must also apply to the allocation of mandates. On the level of the municipality, there should be electoral lists where also non-members figure as candidates.'²⁴ In other words, non-members should be allowed to represent the party in elections and in representative assemblies, thereby tearing down one of the most important privileges between party members and non-party members. Members of the SPD's youth wing shortly after even proposed to dissolve the most basic unit of membership organization, the local *Ortsvereine*, 'once considered holy in the party' altogether, because 'their function today is just about zero'. These should be 'transformed into civic initiatives which think and act like civic initiatives', which would give them much more autonomy and would enable citizens of all convictions to come together and join forces to work at local issues.²⁵

So within the time span of a few years around the turn of the 1980s, all the people's parties claimed to shift away from whatever remained of their mass party traditions. Instead, they dedicated themselves to the ideal of an open party, which they saw it as the cure to heal the haemorrhage of support. The central idea of the open party was everywhere the same, namely to 'break down the walls' between party organizations in all its forms—local and regional sections, the party congress, affiliate sports and cultural organizations, units at firms, churches, and factories—and citizens with all kinds of different backgrounds, beliefs, and convictions. The party organization's main purpose should no longer be to knit members together inside the party. Rather, the energy of the party should be spent on dialogue with the outside world, including with those citizens who were no members. The open party should collect their ideas and engage with their political activities, welcome

²⁴ Projektgruppe SPD 2000 des Parteivorstands, 'Ziele und Wege der Parteireform', in K. Blessing, ed., *SPD 2000. Die Modernisierung der SPD* (Berlin: Schüren Verlag, 1993), 16–46: 35.

²⁵ Wolfgang Michal, *Die SPD-Staatstreu und jugendfrei* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1988), 191–2.

their contributions and be willing to learn from whatever they thought. It should be open to all citizens, rather than seek only to convince like-minded people only. Hence the replacement of community organizers and officials with campaign experts and media-specialists in a trend towards what the Panebianco called the 'electoral-professional party'.²⁶

The whole notion of the 'open party' that 'mirrored' society and 'broke down' the walls between members and ordinary citizens inevitably damaged the position of members. So, paradoxically, while members turned their back on parties in increasing numbers, parties responded by making the whole idea of membership itself less central to their organization. Most importantly, membership was no longer a hard criterion to be able to determine to the party's agenda, its internal debates, and ideology. This had once been the privilege of the party members, who would subsequently try and convince others belonging to the same social group to join them, knocking on doors in the neighbourhood, talking to fellow workers at the factory or in church, or convincing them at the Saturday market in town. But the open party welcomed non-members and their perspectives with open arms. The SPÖ even invited non-members to contribute to the writing of the new landmark party programme of 1978. It collected ideas in public meetings across the country which were open to all Austrians. Unsurprisingly, the ultimate text of the party programme therefore stated that 'we are an open party . . . we look for the partnership with anyone who might not share all our objectives but who supports merely a few points of our programme'.²⁷

More often, however, party leaders preferred initiatives to welcome non-members which were less intellectually demanding than writing policy documents. Attracting people who might not even consider membership required a different kind of events. The SPD talked about the necessity to 'practice new forms of party activity: political engagement should be fun and be attractive. Forums, culture, public meetings, seminars, project groups, [making] magazines or video films', should all be new party activities geared to the world beyond the party.²⁸ It even launched an 'SPD Holiday Service' which organized travels such as a Glasnost experience along the trans-Siberia express. The DC hosted a series of festivals called 'Friendship Parties' which should make the party once again in tune with the spirit of the age. As the initiator later recalled, these festivals should lift the spirits at a moment when:

the situation of the DC was icy; the internal state of the party could be described with one word only: desolation. Where did the party of honest peasants and

²⁶ Panebianco, *Political Parties*, ch. 14.

²⁷ SPÖ, *Parteiprogramm. Beschlossen am Bundesparteitag vom 18. Bis 20 Mai 1978 in Wien* (Vienna: SPÖ, 1978), 15.

²⁸ Projektgruppe SPD 2000 des Parteivorstands, 'Ziele und Wege der Parteireform', 37.

young activists go? It was this memory that inspired me to reach out to our people outside our organizational structures, in their own environment, in a festive atmosphere.²⁹

To combat the gloominess, the programme for its first festival was light and the entourage spectacular. So, certainly, no endless ideological hair picking or political discussions, but theatre, ballet, opera, folk music, and a concert of the Italian American singer Liza Minelli. The whole event was closed by a large *ballo popolare* in which everyone could join, symbolizing the friendship that the festival should foster. Political interventions were limited to a speech by Aldo Moro and to a discussion on 'the values of the city that we want to construct together', underlining that the party wanted to stand close to citizens' day-to-day problems.³⁰ The Friendship Festivals of the DC showed how the party explicitly embraced the 'open party' as a solution to the waning confidence it enjoyed among citizens.

The enthusiasm for shows and spectacles was no coincidence. The commitment to structural party reform by the people's parties' leaders was often more rhetorical than real. This was also visible in efforts to increase the power of ordinary members in the various initiatives to 'democratize' the party from below. These initiatives had the contrary effect of strengthening the position of the party leader further and thus making members less important for the party than they already were. But they were also visible in efforts to enhance the position of women inside parties.

The initiative to open the people's party followed the high-tide of the second wave of feminism in the 1970s. And so obviously, the concern with gender inequality in society more generally also put the gender gap inside party ranks in the spotlight. At times successfully, women's organizations had campaigned for legal reforms in family law, childcare, and equal pay. But inside parties, gender inequalities were also severe and persisting. Party politics remained a male affair, or even became more so than they were already. Women counted for just 18 per cent of all SPD-members, 22 per cent of CDU-members, and 16 per cent of PS-members in the early 1970s.³¹ The ÖVP did slightly better, but even there two-thirds of the member was male. The imbalances were even worse when it came to the share of women in leading roles, for instance on the party board or as elected representatives. Only one in five delegates at the RPR-conference of 1984 was female.³² The CDU made a calculation in 1989 and concluded that out of the

²⁹ Archivio Democrazia Cristiana, Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Rome DC Uffici Centrali SPES/Feste dell'Amicizia, Scatola 17, Fasc. 1.

³⁰ Archivio Democrazia Cristiana, Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Rome DC Uffici Centrali SPES/Feste dell'Amicizia, Scatola 17, Fasc. 1.

³¹ Lösche and Walter, *Die SPD, 167*; G. Allwood and K. Wadia, *Women and Politics in France 1958-2000* (London: Routledge, 2000), 57.

³² P. Brechon, J. Derville, and P. Lecomte, *Les cadres du R.P.R.* (Paris: RPR, 1986), 111.

259 local section presidents, only six were women. There were no women among the ten regional presidents.³³ Elsewhere, the situation was hardly better. In the SPÖ, only one in ten MPs before the 1970s had been female.³⁴ When the PS was formed in 1971, no women were on its party board. The RPR did not believe in supporting women inside the party either. A special publication on women policy published by the party stated that even though 'women begin to be interested in politics', they were underrepresented in public office. This was because women allegedly 'too often have an inferiority complex and say "I don't know anything"' and because 'once that inferiority complex has been overcome, women do not invest enough in their own education'.³⁵ Chirac even let slip in 1978 that more women on the list could, he believed, hurt his party's electoral fortunes.³⁶

Women inside parties argued that tougher measures were needed to counter this trend: gender quotas for leading positions. The use of such quotas was controversial, but in the end by many parties embraced as a key instrument to correct these inequalities and, as they claimed, to become more open and democratic.³⁷ The SPÖ decided on it in 1985, ruling that women should get a share of the mandates equal to their share of the total membership, but at least 25 per cent. The PS decided on quotas a few years earlier, but since they did not know how many members they actually had, the Socialists could not agree on a number for women in public office. Only after PS-women threatened to take their own party to court, the party set a quota of 30 per cent that was also respected.³⁸ After a lengthy debate, in which it was often suggested, as elsewhere, that there were not simply enough qualified women to fill these positions, the SPD adopted a 40 per cent quota of women on party representative boards in 1988. The CDU followed suit. The quota had some effects on how the parties were run on the inside, on the way party members related to each other, and on how the party was governed. The share of women of the total of party members slowly increased, as did their share on the seats of party boards and in representative assemblies. But still, the position of women inside the parties remained a major concern.

The long struggle for women quotas revealed the sexism which persisted in many parties. Tellingly, the prominent feminist SPD-MP Renate Lepsius observed 'anger' towards her with her fellow party colleagues as well as a 'deep resentment in the parliamentary group' when it came to feminist issues and laws to close the

³³ 37. *Bundesparteitag der CDU. 11–13 September 1989 Bremen* (Bonn: CDU, 1989), 281.

³⁴ A. Krizanic-Fallmann, 'Mehr Frauen in die Politik! Intentionen und Strategien', in I. Karlsson, ed., *Frauen in Bewegung—Frauen in der SPÖ* (Vienna: SPÖ, 1998), 113–54.

³⁵ RPR, *Le R.P.R. propose un projet pour les femmes* (Paris: RPR, 1977).

³⁶ Allwood and Wadia, *Women and Politics*, 71.

³⁷ For a comparative overview of the adoption of gender quotas see: M. Caul, 'Political Parties and the Adoption of Candidate Gender Quotas: A Cross-National Analysis', *The Journal of Politics*, 63, 4 (2001), 1214–1229.

³⁸ Allwood and Wadia, *Women and Politics*, 57.

gender gap more generally.³⁹ But the battle for the quotas also showed how difficult it was to change established practices inside the party organization. Indeed, the same impression that despite some measures structural inequalities were not addressed pertained to the question of democratization of parties. As many party leaders were willing to admit, the influence of members on political decisions was small and their autonomy was often marginal. This counted both for individual members and for the many sub-organizations and working groups inside the party. Commenting on the enterprise and youth movements of the PS, Rocard observed that their purpose was 'solely the job of propaganda and they have no autonomy or initiative of their own', their 'existence is purely formal and legal'.⁴⁰ This was, of course, hardly an invitation to join any of them. Despite welcoming the issues brought forward by social movements on the importance of valuing the interests of the young and gender equality, party organizations themselves remained largely dominated by older men and their way of doing politics. Even the generational turnover from people like Adenauer, De Gaulle, and Nenni to men like Kohl, Chirac, and Craxi had done little to change this but rather confirmed this trend.

In theory, at least, the high mass of internal party democracy was the annual congress, where leaders could be held to account and members could take the floor and put forward any kind of proposal they liked. In practice, party democracy at such congresses was often a delusion for those who strived for active participation in key decision-making. Parties worked with an intricate system of trapped delegation, in which regional delegates often represented groups of members of different sizes. Moreover, once present at the conference hall, these delegates joined (and broke away from) the different factions and wings in the party, each of them controlled by the party strongmen who competed for power on the boards. These wings put then forward different final resolutions tied to particular candidates. What followed was a complicated vote, in which individual delegates potentially represented thousands of members who were not present.

Everyone realized that if parties truly wanted to be more open to society, this would have to change. There were plenty of ideas. DC leaders proposed to rejuvenate the party by reforms such as the direct election of the party leader by congress, majority decision-making by congress on other issues (rather than the relative power of the different currents), and overcoming the hurdle of formal membership by also welcoming sympathizers. The PS repeatedly drew up lists of concrete reform proposals to 'confront the decline', as it called it itself, such as lower membership fees, higher quotas for women, no longer requiring a membership card for certain party activities, giving more rights to activists to put more

³⁹ R. Lepsius, *Frauenpolitik als Beruf. Gespräche mit SPD-Parlamentarierinnen* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1987), 234.

⁴⁰ Rocard, 'Un puissant parti socialiste', 167.

issues on the agenda, 'more space for the youth', and 'one person one vote' at elections during the party congress.⁴¹ Kohl talked about 'the need, more than ever, to utilize the knowledge of our members who are neither functionaries nor representatives but want to contribute to the party. The party is run too much by an established and routinized circle that greets new views with mistrust.... I say it clearly: those who have leading positions in the party must lead by example. The last thing we need is a *Verbonzung* of the party, which would alienate us from citizens.'⁴²

But although ideas were plentiful, they were often vague, lacked the financial means to back them up, and failed to win essential support. It was clear that many of the efforts to democratize from the inside were rhetorical rather than practical. They were soundbites of party leaders who wanted to reach over the heads of party bureaucrats to members and give them a sense of empowerment. Essentially, the reform initiatives for open parties left the organizational framework of the people's party unscathed and confirmed the trend away from members as core element of the parties. And one organizational reform exemplified this better than all: many parties introduced the direct election of the party leader (or 'secretary') by individual members over the course of the 1980s. This reform not only undercut the power of various party currents, but it had an unintended side-effect too: this change in party statutes also gave the party leader a direct popular legitimation outside party bureaucracies. It therefore strengthened their own position and allowed them to reach out to citizens more broadly. As such, precisely this aspect of the cherished aim of democratization formalized a final dimension of the open party: the personalization of party politics.

The strengthening of the position of the party leader who aimed to reach over the heads of party members to the population at large was visible everywhere. But it was perhaps nowhere as visible as with Craxi.⁴³ Until Craxi became party leader the PSI's leadership, even though for a long time formally led by Nenni, had traditionally been something of a shared affair, even if only one person could formally hold the party secretary role. Craxi broke with this tradition. He centralized all power in his own hands.⁴⁴ And the fact that he was from 1981 onwards directly elected by the party members rather than by his colleagues strengthened him. Craxi had already a long political career before he assumed the PSI's leadership, campaigning for this father, also a Socialist politician, after the War and then, for himself, to win a seat on the municipal council of Milan. But he also had a fine feeling for how he could overcome the crisis of the mass party as it was analysed by the party's intellectuals. His leadership completely rebranded the

⁴¹ PS, *Motion nationale d'orientation. Congrès de Rennes 1990*, 30–1. Found at <https://archives-socialistes.fr/themes/archives/static/pdfviewer/?docid=278645&language=fra>.

⁴² H. Kohl, 'Die CDU als moderne Volkspartei', in CDU, *Protokoll 36. Bundesparteitag CDU 13.–15. Juni 1988 Wiesbaden* (Bonn: CDU, 1988), 359–403: 364.

⁴³ Mattered, *Storia del PSI*, 199–217.

⁴⁴ Corduener, 'The Italian Socialist Party'.

party and returned its electoral success. The 1984 party congress even re-elected him as leader by acclamation, so even without any formal election.⁴⁵ The PSI's electoral revival in the 1980s was built primarily on Craxi's personality, rather than the party programme. To carefully craft his own image, Craxi enlisted not just the help of his long-time friend media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi who in those days laid the basis of his commercial TV-empire, but also of the artists like Filippo Pansecca who engineered a radical make-over of the party congresses, where the rather dull decorum had always been instrumental to theoretical and strategic discussions. Now the party congresses became spectacular and mediatized ceremonies highlighting Craxi's persona, loaded them with symbolism and made these meetings mirror the spectacle and glamour on Italian TV, with glass pyramids with LEDs or screens which broadcasted Craxi's speeches in different directions, making his face appear in a massive size above the crowd.⁴⁶

Craxi took this trend towards personalization rather far. But elsewhere, too, the direct election of the party leader and the growing prominence of that leader in leaflets, campaign manifestos, on election campaign posters, and on television testified to it: Mitterrand's efforts to supersede his party once he entered the Elysée palace, to Chirac's cultivation of his image as 'bulldozer', the popularity of González in Spain that led to a wave of *Felipismo*, to Kohl's attack on the party *Bonzen*. And paradoxically, also this personalization further undermined the importance of ordinary members. With an increasingly light organization, fewer activists and officials, and more connections to all kinds of diverse social associations, parties were increasingly dominated by the top and the leader—who personified the ambition of the open party to reach out over the heads of members to citizens of all kinds. The objective of the 'open party' was to reconnect to society and to give the legitimacy of parties a highly needed boost. But paradoxically, by simply being the 'image of society', as Rocard had put it, diminishing the importance of members and privileging leader above the party, parties further undermined their own claim that it was crucial for the health of democracy that citizens organized and participated in parties.

The open party was an initiative to reinvigorate flagging party organizations, reconnect with citizens and boost the legitimacy of parties. It was controversial. Critics of the 'open party' argued that diminishing the importance of party members could possibly be the solution to the party's problems that were caused by flagging membership numbers in the first place. Taken to its extreme, it would simply dissolve the party's organization in society, indeed, as an 'image' of society, uncertain what the party stood for and equating members and non-

⁴⁵ Colarizi and Gervasoni, *La cruna dell'ago*, 169.

⁴⁶ Interview with Pansecca found at <http://www.magasinetkote.no/tema-p-nett/2015/2/24/914dlhvg8vt32jylaw9ym8voklgmrn>.

members. PSI-veteran Lombardi, himself the mastermind behind the re-organization of the Socialist party after the Second World War, criticized the 'open party' at the Socialist congress of 1976, calling it 'a rather confused concept' which could lead to 'a party without an organizational network, solely collecting the initiatives that come from society [like] a neutral interpreter'.⁴⁷ One SPD-prominent likewise wondered 'if we equate the non-member with the member, why would anyone would like to join the SPD at all? There must be a limit. Discussing together yes, expertise from the outside world yes, but only SPD-members can make political decisions'.⁴⁸

In any case, the efforts to open to society did not produce the desired effects. The ability of the people's parties to reconnect with the citizens was limited and often proved to be a rather sobering experience for party activists on the ground. The experiences of veteran SPD-politician Peter Glötz, president of a local SPD-section and an experienced campaigner, epitomize this. In the exhausting parliamentary election campaign during the winter of 1983, he arrived on one of the last campaign days after dusk in Mathäuser am Hasenberg on the outskirts of Munich. He came here to enthuse the youth of the place to come and vote for the SPD. In line with the 'open party' philosophy, the SPD invited a rock band to play at the campaign meeting so as to convince the youngsters of the town to attend the election night rally. 'Here' he recalled, 'we did spare neither time or efforts, the rock band is expensive and first class'. Yet the efforts to open to the young and non-party affiliated did not lead to anything. They even alienated people from the old guard. 'Scared by the music fifty comrades sit opposite 150 young people, attracted by the band', Glötz recalled, 'but the 150 young remain silent. We show our multimedia show about the history of our party: no reaction. After a few songs I speak a few words. Again no reaction. They do not even dance. They sit, the couples hold hands, they watch the band, that is all'.⁴⁹ The SPD lost the elections two days later.

If the open party was not successful, this was at least partly because the shift was more rhetorical than practical. Many of the reforms, especially in the field of empowering members and engaging with the young and, especially in the beginning, also women, were purportedly vague so as not to touch on the privileges of established party elites. They spoke with fervour about the need for real democracy inside the party, advocated and promised great changes, and said they valued the voice of each single member. But this counted often only if it did not hurt their own position. Party leader Arnaldo Forlani of the DC remarked that 'we have

⁴⁷ Cited with G. Amato and L. Cafagna, *Duella a sinistra. Socialisti e comunisti nei lunghi anni 70* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1982), 112.

⁴⁸ Intervention of Karlheinz Blessing at the discussion of the reform of party organization, SPD, *Protokolle SPD Parteitag 16–19 November 1993 Wiesbaden* (Bonn: SPD, 1993), 784.

⁴⁹ P. Glötz, *Kampagne in Deutschland. Politisches Tagebuch 1981–1983* (Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1983), 297.

underlined how urgent a decisive reform of our organization is We have agreed that a party that wants to be a place that listens, a movement, needs in the first place an internal structure of discussion and decision that is open to contributions from various directions', but he was careful to add that 'renewal does not mean . . . a generational change . . . it means a reaffirmation of identity'.⁵⁰

Moreover, the purposes of the open party were often simply contradictory. Parties aimed to attract new adherents and at the same time diminished the value they attached to them. Positioning the party as a nexus for all kinds of civic engagement also became increasingly difficult as the party organizations tried to mimic those of social movements. And trying to rally citizens behind certain ideas was complicated as parties sought to simply 'mirror' society or be its 'image'—as if citizens did not look for orientation. As such, the crisis sentiment grew during the 1980s, visible from a further decline in members. The SPD lost 100,000 members in the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁵¹ But there was also a decline of their level of commitment. 'How many comrades just come once, twice to a section meeting and then never return?', the PS asked itself, concluding that it was a 'pretty fragile organization'.⁵² Kohl saw the early success of his membership campaigns evaporate quickly. He soon cried out it was a 'scandal' that only 7 per cent of CDU-members was under the age of 30, which seriously jeopardized the future of the party. One of the respondents to his speech, a foremost local politician, remarked that 'a people's party must move among the people like a fish in the water. We as CDU are at danger of gasping for breath like a fish on the land.'⁵³ Despite all the efforts it put in appearing as 'open' as possible, by the end of the 1980s it was clear that the 'open party' was not the answer to the people's parties' troubles, but that it perhaps contributed to them.

⁵⁰ A. Forlani, 'La dichiarazione di intenti di Arnaldo Forlani al XVIII Congresso Nazionale Della DC', in F. Malgeri, ed., *Storia della Democrazia Cristiana. Dal delitto Moro alla Segretaria Forlani, 1978–1989* (Rome: Edizione Cinque Lune, 1989), 101–8: 106.

⁵¹ Lösche and Walter, *Die SPD*, 159.

⁵² PS, *Motion nationale d'orientation Rennes*, 30.

⁵³ Intervention of Ruprecht Polenz on the speech of Helmut Kohl at CDU, 37. *Bundesparteitag der CDU. 11–13 September 1989 Bremen* (Bonn: CDU, 1989), 263.

The Decline of the People's Party, Fast and Slow

The final decade of the twentieth century began in an atmosphere of great optimism about the future of democracy. This sanguinity had been some time in the making, having been continuously fed by brash statements of political leaders about the superiority of the Western political and economic models and by hopeful events across the Iron Curtain. The growing boldness of the Solidarity trade union in Poland, the 'human chain' of people holding hands almost 700 kilometres across the Baltic, and the Monday demonstrations in Leipzig, together with many other initiatives, stimulated a mood of great expectations. The wind of change that blew through Central Europe gained force on 9 November 1989 when the Berlin Wall came down. An ageing Willy Brandt soon rushed to the city so that one day later, at the town hall of Schönberg, he could speak to Berliners both East and West, assuring them that 'what belongs together will grow back together'. Within a year, the five East German states joined those in the West in a unified Germany.

Politicians in the West, in Germany as elsewhere, were not so much interested in a symbiosis of different political and economic models that had led parallel lives for decades. Rather, the prevailing mood was, in the words of then-American president George H. W. Bush, that 'the Cold War did not end, it was won'.¹ European politicians believed that the fall of the Berlin Wall signalled the 'end of history', as the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama claimed.² Despite what many had feared, the twentieth century, the violent 'age of extremes', was not concluded by a full-blown war between the superpowers with Europe, for the third time, being turned into a battlefield. Rather, so was the conclusion, democracy had, after fascism, won over its final remaining ideological enemy, communism, and this time without a single shot being fired. What would follow was, at least this was the expectation, an age of 'globalization' and 'Europeanization' in which the

¹ See also E. Braat and P. Corduwener, 'Introduction: 1989 and the West: Revisiting the Cold War Victory Narrative', in E. Braat and P. Corduwener, eds, *1989 and the West. Western Europe since the End of the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2020), 1–14.

² F. Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest* 16 (1989), 3–18.

values of democracy and free market capitalism were endorsed around the globe—but also ever more strongly embraced at home.³

As politicians lined up to cheer democracy's victory, they declared all thorny political and social issues a thing of the past. Kohl claimed that 'the traditional social questions, that have occupied us in Germany since the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century, have largely been answered'.⁴ The new SPD-leader Gerhard Schröder cheered that 'the market economy is, I think, without alternative'.⁵ The Austrian Socialists agreed, concluding that with the fall of the Berlin Wall, an 'era came to an end. The central problems for social democracy have been solved. Societal issues that used to be important for social democrats have been eliminated'.⁶

However, while often remembered as the decade in which democracy reigned supreme, the 1990s were, as this chapter shows, also a decade in which the erosion of the foundations and support of the people's parties further gained pace. Indeed, party leaders shared a sense of growing urgency to reform their relationship with citizens but also an inability to make the reforms necessary to achieve this. The victory mood after the end of the Cold War contributed to this. The perceived end of ideological conflict stimulated a process in which the people's parties of the centre-left and centre-right became ever more alike. And because ideological conflict was now allegedly a thing of the past, the already strong conviction of people's party leaders that politics were most of all administration became more deeply entrenched. Any problems could and should not be solved by starting with some ideological assumption or by not even looking at the interests of certain social groups. They could be fixed with technocratic, scientific, and pragmatic solutions of 'common sense'. Moreover, the end of the great ideological strife also further unblocked party systems. The formal end of battles between 'left' and 'right', 'socialism' and 'capitalism' in a geopolitical sense, used to be reflected in a watered-down version in domestic arenas. It opened the road to unexpected coalitions (between free market Liberals and Social Democrats for instance) while the disintegrating vote of the people's party opened space for all kinds of minor parties to the left (Greens, break-away hard-core Socialists and Communists) and right (far-right populists) and everything in between (mostly regionalists) to make headway. By the end of the decade, however, it was obvious that despite what people like Kohl argued, the 'central problems' of politics had not been solved or 'eliminated'. They changed, with the question how to relate to

³ On the way neo-liberalism in Western Europe was strengthened by the end of the Cold War see P. Ther, *Europe since 1989: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

⁴ Speech by Helmut Kohl at the 7. *Parteitag der Christlich Demokratischen Union Deutschlands, Karlsruhe, 16.–18. Oktober 1995* (Bonn: CDU, 1995), 31.

⁵ Intervention of Gerhard Schröder at the *Parteitag der SPD in Hannover, 2.–4. Dezember 1997. Protokoll* (Bonn: SPD, 1998), 731.

⁶ SPÖ, *Sozialdemokratie. Vorschläge zur Diskussion über Österreichs Zukunft* (Vienna: SPÖ, 1989), 3, 93.

'globalization' (and Europeanization) replacing that of the classic social questions of the past century as the new dividing line. And precisely on those new issues the people's parties were seen as distant from ordinary people's concerns. Across the continent now not only members but also voters increasingly abandoned the people's parties and voted for alternatives that challenged the status quo.

The presumed 'end of history' proclaimed by Fukuyama and cheered by many others was of course not the end of ideological struggle but a deeply ideological assumption in itself. Still, Gaullist, Christian Democrat, and Socialist politicians largely cheered it as a major achievement—as if the struggle between ideas was something 'old-fashioned' that did not belong to the twenty-first century for which they now prepared. 'Is there still a difference between Left and Right?', Jospin asked rhetorically. He answered the question himself, noting that the growing consensus between 'the governing left and conservative parties is certain. Without a doubt the electoral passions are still there . . . but essentially, and viewed in a period of fifteen years, French political life has really known a growing consensus.'⁷ Similarly, Schröder told the SPD party congress that 'consensus is a constitutive element of our democracy', and just as 'after the War it was the precondition of quick reconstruction', its value should not be forgotten in the post-Cold War world.⁸

In practice, this consensus was enabled largely by the fact that social democrats moved ever further to the political centre, a centre that, at least in socioeconomic terms, lay ever further to the right. Social democrats had ditched Marxism in the 1950s and Keynesianism in the late 1970s. But with 'real-existing socialism' now a thing of the past, and, at least in their own view, the 'social questions' of their time being definitely solved, Social democrats felt the need to come up with a new legitimization for social democrat politics. Indeed, as Jospin observed, social democracy used to derive its identity from opposition between the US and the Soviet Union, while 'the social democracy of the last half-century, existing between capitalism and communism—a kind of "in-between-ism"—no longer makes sense'.⁹

The new perspective was found in what later would be called the 'third way' of social democracy.¹⁰ Just as postwar Keynesianism and later neo-liberalism, this way of thinking was influenced deeply by what happened in Britain (the prominent sociologist Anthony Giddens this time in particular), but it again resonated with trends already visible on the continent.¹¹ The third way picked up on the

⁷ L. Jospin, *L'invention du possible* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), 301, 303.

⁸ Intervention of Gerhard Schröder at the SPD, *Parteitag der SPD in Hannover, 2.–4. Dezember 1997. Protokoll* (Bonn: SPD, 1998), 732.

⁹ L. Jospin, *Modern Socialism* (London: Fabian Society, 1999), 2.

¹⁰ Mudge, *Leftism Reinvented*, ch. 8.

¹¹ A. Giddens, *The Third Way. The Renewal of Social Democracy* (London: Fabian Society, 1998).

fascination with 'modernization' (and technology) among European Socialists of the 1980s and built on their growing suspicion towards the institutions and programmes of the welfare state, which were held responsible for the consistently high unemployment and problems of the labour market in its continued transition from an industrial to a service economy.¹² In a 'working document' written jointly with British prime minister Tony Blair, Schröder captured the spirit of third way principles. Globalization was cheered because it would help new businesses to 'prosper', public expenditure had reached the 'limits of acceptability', the social security system should encourage 'initiative', labour markets must be 'flexible', and world trade ought to be 'liberalized'.¹³

Put together, and even though it claimed to do otherwise, the Third Way therefore very much mimicked the principles of neo-liberalism that were thought to have won the Cold War.¹⁴ Moreover, it perfectly confirmed to the trend of people's parties' politicians to be concerned with problems of government first and foremost. The constituents—let alone members—of Social democrat parties did not feature once in the founding document of the Third Way. The question which social groups, if any, the Social Democrats actually represented was not addressed. Blair and Schröder preferred to take on the question how the economy should be managed in a time when the state should be further rolled back. Perhaps also for these reasons, it did not have an equal appeal everywhere. The Third Way was influential in Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium, but more controversial in France. Still, also here, people like Rocard and Jospin, both prime minister in the 1990s, in the end went a long way in the same direction. The latter observed that the traditional language (let alone policies) of the left no longer connected to the reality of the social and working lives of most French people. 'Many concepts' that the Socialists used only recently 'would not appeal to today's Frenchmen... words like "class front", "autogestion", "rupture with capitalism", we have stopped to refer to them or have not translated them into government politics'. And the same, Jospin added, even counted for the notion of the 'working class' itself.¹⁵

While the Socialists embraced this tendency, the French Communists resisted it. They suffered further until the PCF was only a marginal group on the political scene.¹⁶ The Italian Communists, by contrast, tried to turn the post-Cold War situation to their own advantage. Here, the biggest changes of the left after the fall of the Berlin Wall occurred. Exactly seventy years after its founding in the 'red years' after the First World War, the PCI dissolved itself at a frenzied congress in

¹² Lösche and Walter, *Die SPD*, 126–127; Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, 558–559; Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, 151.

¹³ T. Blair and G. Schröder, *Europe: the Third Way/Die neue Mitte* (n.p., 1998).

¹⁴ J. M. Dostal, 'The Crisis of German Social Democracy Revisited', *The Political Quarterly* 88.2 (2010), 230–40.

¹⁵ Jospin, *L'invention*, 308.

¹⁶ G. Ross, 'Party Decline and Changing Party Systems: France and the French Communist Party', *Comparative Studies* 25.1 (1992), 43–61.

the beach town of Rimini in 1991. Building on more prudent efforts in this direction during the preceding years, the party decided to transform the PCI into the 'Democratic Party of the Left' (PDS, a small Communist wing refused and established the 'Re-founded Communist Party').¹⁷ Seven decades of Communist tradition could not suddenly be erased inside the PDS, of course. There remained a strong current critical of social democracy inside the new party (and the old PCI's symbol still featured on the new party's banner, even though much smaller).¹⁸ Still, its main programmatic points were now very similar to that of Socialist parties elsewhere: decentralizing the state, reducing public debt, privatization of inefficient state companies, stopping abuses of the welfare state, all alongside a strong emphasis on its commitment to parliamentary democracy. Especially the party's second leader, Massimo d'Alema, notwithstanding his own Communist past, was an early adept of third way politics.¹⁹

The PCI's makeover into the PDS culminated in a paradox. With its commitment to parliamentary democracy and free market capitalism, the new PDS displayed much more ideological symmetry with Socialist parties abroad than ever before (and, indeed, it soon joined the Socialists International to underline it). Its makeover also moved the party's programme much closer to the parties that it had opposed for decades: the PSI and the DC. Still, at the same time, the PDS sensed that with the end of the Cold War huge changes were possible in Italy. The informal rule of Italian politics since 1947, namely the exclusion of the Communists from government power, no longer applied, because the Communist Party was no longer there. Government alternation seemed possible for the first time. Indeed, in the first-post Cold War elections of 1992 the PDS stated that Italy's 'future requires a change of the leading class' and that a vote for change in the elections would allow 'Italy to close an entire phase of the history of the republic'.²⁰ These proved to be prophetic words—although not in the way the PDS intended them at the time.

On the surface, the end of the Cold War seemed to confirm a broad convergence to the people's party model, resulted in an exaltation of its virtues of compromise, collaboration, and consensus, and seemed to legitimate a managerial style of politics. However, despite their apparently buoyant displays of confidence about the superiority of the people's party, also party leaders could not ignore that they could be ever less sure of voters' support. So tributes to the apparent victory of

¹⁷ See for a long-term perspective on the transformation of the PCI: M.J. Bull, 'The Italian Communist Party in the 1980s and the Denouement of the Italian Party System', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 28, 2 (2023), 176–190.

¹⁸ M. J. Bull, 'The PDS, the Progressive Alliance and the Crisis', *Modern Italy* 1.1 (1995), 30–9.

¹⁹ G. Pasquino, 'A Tale of Two Parties: Forza Italia and the Left Democrats', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 8.2 (2003), 197–215: 212.

²⁰ 'Manifesto elettorale del PDS', *L'Unità*, 15 March 1992, 30.

democracy as a global value co-existed with grave concerns about the state of democracy at home. The RPR concluded at its 1991 conference that 'our democracy, in a time when its ideas triumph on the European continent, shows signs of languishment. France is in pieces.'²¹ Staking his third claim to the presidency in the elections four years later, Jacques Chirac stated that 'France is suffering from a pain more profound than politicians, responsible economists, intellectuals, and media celebrities can imagine. The people have lost trust . . . The gap between the man in the street and a political class is taking on dangerous proportions. The political leaders are offering France the spectacle of a masked ball.'²²

But rather than addressing their own managerial style of politics, the solutions for this crisis were sought after in now expected directions, namely, to paradoxically underline ever stronger the claim that the people's parties were essential to govern a society ever 'on the move and fragmented' as Chirac called it.²³ This unveiled the belief of such leaders that, other than their challengers on the left and right, only the people's parties could provide stable and responsible government. The continued efforts to further open their parties were closely related to this. These two objectives were on the one hand complementary, because the 'open party' freed the people's parties of old obligations to represent certain constituents (as the programme of the 'third way' exemplified). But they were also contradictory, as the all the energy and resources that were spent on governing by party leaders and officials could not be spent on reinforcing somehow their ties with society.

What complicated the difficult task of representing people from below further was that a new political sphere emerged where representation could take place in the 1990s: Europe. Of course, this did not come out of the blue. During the period of high inflation and currency instability in the 1970s, governments had increasingly looked to 'Europe' as a solution for the problem of monetary instability. Their efforts resulted in the establishment of the European Monetary System in which European currencies fluctuated within certain margins to foster monetary stabilization. Devaluations were certainly not a thing of the past (especially in France and Italy) and some currencies (the lira most notably) were at times speculated outside the EMS due to growing concerns about the country's high public debt. Still, the EMS was indicative of a renewed energy to push European integration in the 1980s, visible also in the empowerment (and direct election) of the members of the European parliament, the abolition of internal frontiers in the Schengen area, and the enlargement of the European Community with three former dictatorships Greece, Portugal, and Spain.

Given these important steps forward, it was not surprising that 'Europe' surfaced as the major answer to the question how to confront the big economic

²¹ RPR, *La France en Mouvement. Rassembler pour Changer* (Paris: RPR, 1991), 1.

²² J. Chirac, *La France pour tous* (Paris: Nil éditions, 1994), 9–12. ²³ *Ibid.*, 42.

and geopolitical challenges of the early 1990s. This answer came in the form of the Treaty of Maastricht. Here, European leaders decided to transform the European Community into a union and decided on the introduction of the euro. This was allegedly the price that Mitterrand asked from Kohl to support German unification (thereby intending to solve the perennial problem of the weak *franc* against a strong *Mark*). But Germany, still haunted by the trauma of high inflation, insisted that the euro, if at all, should be made on its own terms. This meant a strong and independent European Central Bank, while only countries that fulfilled the 'Maastricht criteria' (later codified in the 'Pact for Growth and Stability'), or were steadily on track doing so, would be welcome to join the exclusive club.²⁴

Meeting the criteria of Maastricht became a huge challenge for governments of southern Europe. But it became something of an obsession too, as no one wanted to be relegated to the second division of European powers. Particularly in Rome, the so-called 'external constraints' that meeting the conditions of the common currency posed on national politicians were initially welcomed—even by those politicians themselves.²⁵ The austerity that it required was considered an antidote to carelessly spending politicians, booming public debt, and tax evasion. To meet the Maastricht criteria, the Socialist government of Giuliano Amato, a distinguished and austere law professor and therefore a somewhat unlikely Craxi ally, soon introduced an unprecedented series of tax increases and spending cuts in health care, social security, and pensions. He also moved to privatize some of the big state firms and conglomerates. When his government fell, Amato was replaced by the respected governor of the Italian Central Bank, Azeglio Ciampi, who continued this agenda (and became the first technocrat to lead a Western European government in decades). Both austerity and technocracy set an Italian pattern that continued throughout the 1990s (and beyond) to meet the requirements of monetary integration. It nonetheless had results. Italy brought the government deficit down sufficiently to join the common currency at the same time as the others.

The 'external constraints' of the euro were a complex economic straitjacket. But they were illustrative of the fact that the task of parties to represent society from below was becoming even more difficult. The job of the party organization seemed to support the government and this was at times made very explicit: 'the first rule of the relationship between party and government is that the party should support the government', the PS concluded at its congress of 1990.²⁶ This was obviously a long way from the 'Blum doctrine', but even from the critical approach of many

²⁴ M. Gilbert, *European Integration. A Political History* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2021), ch. 8 and ch. 9.

²⁵ P. Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents. Family, Civil Society, State 1980–2001* (London: Penguin Press, 2001), 285–324.

²⁶ PS, *Motion nationale d'orientation. Congrès de Rennes 1990*, 27. Found at <https://archives-socialistes.fr/themes/archives/static/pdfviewer/?docid=278645&language=fra>.

Socialists even a few years earlier. Now, 'European government' also required support somehow, adding another layer of government that had to be represented to citizens rather than the other way around—in a fine illustration of what representation scholar Michael Saward called 'statel representation'.²⁷ Social democrats and Christian Democrats nonetheless took up this task with enthusiasm because it could help them in their mission to provide governability. Indeed, Walter Veltroni, the young and upcoming star of the PDS and Italian vice-premier in the late 1990s, noted that 'Italy is a country in dire need of big reforms. But the instrument to achieve them, the state, is incapable.' Europe could help to fix this, even if this meant austerity at home. 'Having signed the "Stability Pact" is not only an obligation for those who, like us, believe in European integration', Veltroni added. Rather, 'it is a duty assumed by a modern Left for the Italians', because 'even without Maastricht, we would have to cure the Italian economy'.²⁸

What followed for Veltroni (and others) was to use the PDS-meetings as a stage to list the achievements of the government in 'curing' Italy's problems of government: lowering inflation, decreasing public debt, selling state assets, and reforming the welfare system. But in exhaling their government achievements, and seeing their own achievements mostly in these terms, the PDS formed no exception. Even in the formulation of the third way principles members and constituents of parties remained largely invisible. And even in countries that were right on track to meeting the Maastricht criteria, or invented them, the management of precisely these parameters of the economy replaced other issues from the agenda at party congresses and conventions. At the party conference of the CDU in 1998, the final one before the elections that year that would oust Kohl from office after sixteen years, even the CDU presented itself through its achievements in government to trim the state, reform the bureaucracy, and promote competition. The speech of the faction leader of the party in parliament, Wolfgang Schäuble, was largely a list of socioeconomic reforms, stating how the CDU had promoted 'more performance and will to perform, more own responsibility, less state intervention and bureaucracy, these are the principles that guide us'. And this all led to achievements such as the modernization of labour law, reduction of social security, privatization, and deregulation. These were not just socioeconomic measures or even merely 'principles that guide us'. For the CDU, they had become an integral and essential part of what democracy was about in the 1990s: 'competition fosters responsibility, and responsibility is a principle for every functioning democracy'.²⁹

²⁷ M. Saward, 'Making Representations: Modes and Strategies of Political Parties', *European Review* 16.3 (2008), 271–86: 277.

²⁸ 'Relazione di Walter Veltroni', Congresso Nazionale del Partito Democratico di Sinistra (1997), 4, 7, 9. Found at <https://patrimonio.archivio.senato.it/inventario/scheda/bettino-craxi/IT-AFS-020-011805/relazioni-d-alema-e-veltroni-al-congresso-pds-del-18-2-97#lg=1&slide=2>.

²⁹ Intervention of Wolfgang Schäuble at the CDU-Conference of 1998: *Protokoll. 10 Parteitag der CDU Deutschlands 18.–19. Mai 1998 Bremen* (Bonn: CDU, 1998), 145, 155.

The notion that for parties their most important role in a democracy was providing 'administration', in other words, was ever more dominant.

While commitment to government achievements became ever stronger and more narrowly defined in neo-liberal terms, initiatives to further open the party to all citizens continued and further eroded the party's roots in society. The CDU often debated how the 'people's party' could be attuned to the new age. It aired several proposals, including 'guest membership' and more opportunities for citizens to contribute to the debate inside the party. It even organized a competition for party members who reached out to citizens who never came in touch with the party. Projects included an initiative called 'Open Doors' in which a local CDU-branch acted as mediator between citizens and (government) organizations such as the police and social services that they had issues with. And there was the 'city café' of the CDU-branch that opened a bar in a town's centre where citizens could walk in freely and discuss their concerns. These were important because, 'people do not come any longer to the traditional [party] meeting in rooms at eight in the evening. We want to explore new avenues. That is why we are going where the citizen is.'³⁰ These were the kind of 'flexible and open forms of party work that recognize the changing social relations' for the party.³¹

Parties elsewhere had similar initiatives. The question of an 'open and strong party' dominated the party meetings of the PS in the 1990s as it sought for a new identity while the Mitterrand era ended.³² The party even hosted a special 'national convention' on the topic to underline its importance. Various initiatives were aired to stop the haemorrhage in support, such as discounts on membership fees for young people, decentralization by means of giving the local sections more power, 'one man one vote' in congress meetings (rather than the delegate system), and no longer requiring party membership as a hard condition for people to help the party in times of elections.³³ This should 'modify the nature of our party and transform it into a club of supporters'.³⁴ The SPD likewise concluded that 'neither ideological principles nor socioeconomic groups can be the fundament of political parties today. They should much more actively win over their supporters.' Therefore, it aired what it called the 'network party' that saw the party as an instrument to connect various groups in society, a platform basically, or, as it phrased it, 'the SPD will be transformed into a service centre'. This desire to connect to social change should also be reflected among its representatives, with the decision to have thirty MPs under 40 years old elected and to attract ten people

³⁰ The competition was presented by Angela Merkel at the CDU-Congress of 1999: *Protokoll 12. Parteitag der CDU Deutschlands 26.-27. April 1999 Erfurt* (Bonn: CDU, 1999), 93–6.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 257.

³² Bergounioux and Grunberg, *L'ambition et le remords*, 387–417.

³³ PS, *Motion nationale d'orientation. Congrès de Rennes*, 37.

³⁴ PS, *Pour le Socialisme. Un parti fort uni ouvert sur l'avenir* (Paris: PS, 1990), 11.

without party affiliation to figure on the party list at parliamentary elections.³⁵ The Democratic Party, successor to the PDS in Italy, experimented with American-style primaries to elect its candidate for the premiership. Party membership was not necessary to vote, reflecting that the party leader was not only party leader, but appealed to much broader sections of the electorate.³⁶

Such initiatives, however creative, were not enough to turn around the negative trend that the people's parties faced. And they appeared not able to match the growing existential doubts whether the model of the people's party was still fit for the next century. Rocard observed that 'we are the heirs to a form of politics that is nearing exhaustion. Born in the latter half of the last century, our parties and unions have served essentially as means and places of political and social integration.... All this has now partly disappeared. This is what we call the "representation crisis"'.³⁷ Kohl dedicated an entire CDU-congress to the question of the 'people's party tomorrow'. He displayed pride about the party's achievements in the past, but also acknowledged that:

many people in the audience wonder, how is this today? We should recognize that in the last couple of decades things have changed completely. We all know this. And the question is whether my party, as it acts daily on all levels, can still meet these changed expectations...and that does not only count for our Christian Democrat Union. The same discussion takes place in that other large people's party, the SPD.³⁸

One of the final leading figures inside the DC even put it more strongly. Invoking the idea of Gramsci, launched at the beginning of the century, of political parties as the 'modern prince', he noted that the twentieth century had indeed been the century of parties, in whatever form. But now, 'that prince is dead, killed most of all by its own nature than by its adversaries, leaving a void that in one way or another will be filled'.³⁹

Such realizations clearly revealed the paradox of the people's party in the 1990s. The initiatives of the open party were plenty and sometimes also creative. But while they were motivated by the losses in membership (the SPÖ lost two-thirds of its 600,000 members in the fifteen years following 1990, the CDU and the PS a

³⁵ M. Machning, 'Von Tanker zur Flotte. Die SPD als Volkspartei und Mitgliederpartei von Morgen', in M. Machning and H.-P. Bartels, *Der rasende Tanker. Analysen und Konzepte zur Modernisierung der sozialdemokratischen Organisation* (Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 2001), 101–17: 111–14.

³⁶ S. Vassallo and G. Passarelli, 'Centre-Left Prime Ministerial Primaries in Italy: The Laboratory of the "Open Party" Model', *Contemporary Italian Politics* 8.1 (2015), 12–23.

³⁷ M. Rocard, *The Prospects Facing Social Democracy in Europe* (Amsterdam: Weekbladpers, 1992), 13.

³⁸ Intervention of Helmut Kohl at 37. *Bundesparteitag der CDU. 11–13 September 1989 Bremen* (Bonn: CDU, 1989), 241.

³⁹ B. Ciccardini, *Il Principe che è morto. Partiti giacobini, partiti popolari e movimenti* (n.p., 1993), 6.

quarter of their members in the 1990s, a third of its almost one million members abandoned the SPD over the course of the decade),⁴⁰ they seemed to underline that members were ever less important for them. Rather than rallying people behind their ideas, parties now offered them a 'network' or 'service centre' to meet others. And at the same time, these social trends did not substantially affect how many people's party politicians saw themselves. They were forces that, despite their dwindling support, were indispensable for the functioning of democracy, not because they represented society from below but because of their qualities to enhance governability. Indeed, from this point of view they still found themselves indispensable and sometimes even talked about new initiatives outside party politics with disdain. As D'Alema asserted at a PDS-meeting in 1997, 'we are not civil society against the parties. We are the parties. This is a truth that cannot be denied. And we cannot tell ourselves these late '68-like stories. I do not accept the idea that politics is made by citizens and not by politicians.'⁴¹

Such claims would have perhaps some legitimate basis if people at least continued to vote for the people's parties. But also this was ever less the case. Whereas first, the members of the people's parties increasingly left, now voters followed too. In the Dutch general election of 1994, the Social Democrats and Christian Democrats jointly lost 32 out of their 103 seats, meaning that they no longer had a majority among them in parliament. The Christian Democrats ended up in opposition for the first time since 1917, while the Social Democrats formed a government with the free-market Liberals. This would have been unthinkable during the Cold War but was enabled by the fact that, in the words of the Labour Party's leader, the party had 'shed its ideological feathers' as he unpoetically called it. Belgium soon was governed by a similar coalition (just like in the Netherlands despite Socialist losses) and the Christian Democrats were relegated to opposition for the first time since a short spell in the 1950s. In Austria, Haider's Freedom Party ate away support from the ÖVP and SPÖ at every election, rising from 5 per cent in 1983—before Haider took over—to catching almost one in four votes in 1994. This meant that the country resorted to the 'Grand Coalitions' between Christian Democrats and Socialists as had been common until 1966.

Even the German party system, long considered a beacon of stability, was affected by the erosion of the people's parties (even if this erosion went slower than elsewhere). After the Greens turned the three-party system into a four-party one in the 1980s, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) entered parliament of a unified Germany. The PDS was the successor party to the Socialist Unity Party,

⁴⁰ F. Walter, *Abschied von der Toskana. Die SPD in der Ära Schröder* (VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2005), 9.

⁴¹ Massimo d'Alema, cited with G. Crainz, *Il paese reale. Dall'assassino di Moro fino a l'Italia di oggi* (Rome: Donzelli, 2014), 331.

the party of East Germany's Communist dictatorship. Its electoral gains were modest, and limited to the East, but still showed that the CDU and SPD had difficulty rooting in the Eastern half of the country.⁴² Despite the reputation of Kohl as hero of German unity, the CDU struggled to establish a secure base there and the many scandals in which the party was involved did not help. This mostly involved the revealing of former activities of its leading politicians there for the feared former East German secret police, the Stasi. Only in one of the five former East German states did the CDU prime minister not step down because of previous Stasi activities.⁴³ But this was not the only problem of CDU and SPD here. Their efforts to export the model of the people's party, based on a large membership base, from West to East also failed. The SPD there had, much more than in the West, all characteristics of a vote-seeking rather than membership-seeking party.⁴⁴ A decade after German unification, the former Communist party remained the strongest party there in terms of members. CDU and SPD remained far behind. Not even 10 per cent of their members lived in the former East. For many in these parts of the country, the people's parties remained detached from their daily concerns, leading to increasingly frustrated interventions also at party meetings. When the CDU discussed drafts of a new programme, in Hamburg in 1994, one leader captured the scepticism of many, by saying that many people asked themselves 'What do you even want with a new programme in the new states? Don't you have anything more important to do? How are you supposed to convince people with such fundamental statements?', noting that the people in the former East had bigger problems than this programme, and that they were tired of ideology.⁴⁵

Yet the biggest—and the first fatal—blow to the people's parties came in Italy. The words of the PDS of the possibility to close 'an entire phase' of Italian history were truly prophetic. The political changes that swept Italy between 1992 and 1994 were so profound that they have been characterized as giving birth to what was called at the time a 'Second Republic' (even though observers became sceptical of the term later).⁴⁶ The changes had long roots which went in different directions and formed an entangled history of several trends and problems in Italian politics, economy, and society which came together. There was the transformation of the

⁴² E. Jesse, 'Parteien und Parteiensystem in den neue Bundesländer', in V. Kronenberg and T. Mayer, eds, *Volksparteien. Konzepte, Konkurrenz und Konstellationen. Erfolgsmodell für die Zukunft?* (Sankt Augustin: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2009), 291–303.

⁴³ Bösch, *Macht und Machtverlust*, 139.

⁴⁴ K. Gabrow, *Abschied von der Massenpartei. Die Entwicklung der Organisationsmuster von SPD und CDU seit der deutschen Vereinigung* (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitätsverlag, 2000).

⁴⁵ Intervention of Christoph Bergner, CDU, 5. *Bundesparteitag der CDU Deutschland. Protokoll*. 21.–23. Februar 1994, Hamburg (Bonn: CDU, 1994), 191.

⁴⁶ P. Grillo di Cortona, *Dalla Prima alla Seconda Repubblica. Il Cambiamento politico in Italia* (Rome: Carocci, 2007); S. Z. Koff and S. P. Koff, *Italy from the First to the Second Republic* (London: Routledge, 2000). See for a critique on the notion of the 'second republic' M. J. Bull, 'The Italian Transition That Never Was', *Modern Italy* 17.1 (2012), 103–18.

PCI in the PDS. There was the 'external constraint' of the prospective of euro-membership which put huge pressure on government finances and rendered the Christian Democrat/Socialist model based on deflation and heavy public spending obsolete. At the same time, there was an elevation in the struggle of public prosecutors against the mafia, culminating in an alarmist and tragic series of assassinations of the public prosecutors themselves.⁴⁷

So pressure was building up on the people's parties from different sides. The electoral performance of the PDS in the 1992 elections was largely disappointing, but the same counted for that of the DC, which had sunk below the important threshold of 30 per cent of the vote for the first time. It showed that with the collapse of domestic communism, the old saying 'to pinch your nose and vote DC' no longer applied for many voters. In the North, the Lega Nord made enormous gains on a programme that was not only geared against the South, but also against the might of traditional parties. It captured one in five votes in the Veneto, and one in four in Lombardy, in the heartlands of the Christian Democrats. In the South, the popular mayor of Palermo Leoluca Orlando broke away from the DC and established a party with a strong anti-mafia agenda. But also inside the party people started to break ranks. This counted in particular for the maverick politician Mario Segni, son of a former president, who had become frustrated by all the talk but the lack of action on institutional reform in the 1980s. He now took this agenda from parliament to the streets in a series of referenda.⁴⁸ The first of these, held already in 1991, centred on the seemingly technical issue of the abolishment of preference voting (a powerful mechanism of local party politicians to control their patronage). Craxi advised the people to spend the day at the beach (making Segni observe that the man of the 'big reforms' had 'in short time become the symbol of conservatism, the enemy of reform'),⁴⁹ but Segni's camp unexpectedly reached the turnout threshold and secured almost 95 per cent of the vote behind their plans.

The wind for change gained force when over the course of 1992 a major corruption scandal broke loose. It started in February with the arrest of Mario Chiesa. He was caught red handed flushing down the toilet millions of *lire* in kickbacks that he received from a cleaning company to obtain a contract to clean his hospital. Craxi dismissed it as a minor and isolated case, but it was the beginning of what was soon called *Tangentopoli* or 'Bribesville'. A determined pool of Milanese magistrates moved forward to reveal the corrupt practices

⁴⁷ Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents*, ch. 8 gives a good overview of the quick succession of interwoven events.

⁴⁸ P. Carusi, 'The Inner Decline of the Christian Democrat Party. Mario Segni and the Origins of the Referendum Movement for Electoral System Reform', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 28, 2 (2023), 191–204.

⁴⁹ M. Segni, *La rivoluzione interrotta. Diario di quattro anni che hanno cambiato l'Italia* (Rome, Rizzoli, 1994), 39.

involving all government parties (and, although to a much smaller extent, the PDS). In the awarding of government contracts—for anything from cleaning a local hospital to those of the state's energy giant ENI—a kickback on the budget to the parties had become custom. Soon, the prosecutors worked their way up the ladder towards ever more powerful politicians, until dozens of prominent MPs and businessmen were under investigation, and they reached people of the stature of former premiers Forlani and Craxi.⁵⁰ The magistrates were emboldened by an ever angrier public opinion. Amato later recalled how 'parties ever more risked being regarded as parasites of the *palazzo* that occupied their institutional role no longer to represent the people, but to be fed'.⁵¹ In more down-to-earth terms, the final DC leader observed that 'we are weak because we are decadent'.⁵² This resonated with how some of the politicians involved reacted. In an infamous speech in parliament, Craxi defended the kickbacks as the 'cost of politics'. But this was in vain. He soon escaped to Tunisia to avoid serving a ten-year prison sentence.⁵³

Amid the growing public outrage about this all, Segni and his allies moved forward with another series of referenda. These now sought to abolish some of the core institutions that had formally sanctioned the central place of parties in Italian democracy: the law on public financing of parties, introduced in 1974, and the proportional representation system in elections for the Italian Senate, in place since the 1940s. Voter turnout was high, and so was the desire for change: the laws were repealed by more than 90 per cent and 80 per cent of voters respectively. This was the final blow for the people's parties. Amato called the referendum result an 'authentic regime change' and handed in his resignation.⁵⁴ He was replaced with the technocrat Ciampi, who kept the country on course for the reforms needed to qualify for the euro and prepared it for new elections. In these elections, the PSI and DC no longer competed. The DC formally dissolved itself and the PSI simply disintegrated.

Especially the unveiling of extensive corruption made the Italian situation in the early 1990s seem exceptional. Both foreign and Italian observers set the country firmly apart from other Western European countries, seeing the country's political class as a 'nomenklatura' that had more in common with the former Soviet-satellite states than with anything else.⁵⁵ But soon other major European parties were scrutinized by magistrates as well. The PSOE of González was ousted

⁵⁰ S. Gundle, 'The Rise and Fall of Craxi's Socialist Party', in: S. Gundle and S. Parker eds., *The New Italian Republic. From the Fall of the Berlin Wall to Berlusconi* (London: Routledge, 1996), 85–98.

⁵¹ Interview with Giuliano Amato, in G. Acquaviva and L. Covatta, eds, *Il Crollo. Il PSI nella crisi della prima Repubblica* (Venice: Marsilio, 2013), 489.

⁵² M. Martinazzoli, 'La competizione della proposta. Consiglio nazionale DC, 14 ottobre 1992', in F. Malgeri, *Storia della Democrazia Cristiana, 1989–1993. Il tramonto della Dc* (Rome: Edizione Cinque Lune, 1993), 217–26: 225.

⁵³ Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, ch. 8.

⁵⁴ Lupo, *Partito e antipartito*, 15.

⁵⁵ Ciccardini, *Il principe è morto*, 93.

from office after a string of scandals were exposed by Spanish media, ranging from a massive corruption affair involving the party's appointee as director of the Civil Guard to a wiretapping scandal. French prosecutors investigated Jacques Chirac and accused him of graft, bribery, and illegal party financing. As sitting president, he could not be convicted, but the accusations chased him until he was finally sentenced in 2011. And in Germany, a major corruption scandal hit the CDU and scarred Kohl's legacy. It involved the party keeping secret accounts for illegal donations since the 1980s and the alleged buying of influence by companies in key decisions, such as by the high-tech concern Thyssen and during the privatization of state-owned assets in East Germany. Although corruption was less extensive than in Italy, there was for many more than a passing resemblance to what had happened to the DC before, also because it involved influential figures such as Kohl. The leading journal *Der Spiegel* commented that 'the entirely automatic equivalence "the party is the state, the state is the party" was the axiom of behaviour of German politicians'. Italy's chief prosecutor of *Tangentopoli* Antonio di Pietro called the German scandal a 'photocopy' of what had happened in Italy.⁵⁶

Still, feelings of Italian exceptionalism persisted and seemed to be confirmed by what came in place of the parties of the so-called First Republic.⁵⁷ Just two months before the 1994 elections, Silvio Berlusconi announced that he would 'enter the field'. Berlusconi was a self-made billionaire who made his fortune in construction, publishing but most of all through his commercial TV-stations. In a speech, made, importantly not at a party congress, but on prime time TV aimed at all Italians, he announced his candidature as prime minister and the launch of a new political movement, *Forza Italia*. This would not, he assured in the speech, be 'the umpteenth political party or fraction', but a 'free movement of voters of a completely new type'.⁵⁸ *Forza Italia* was, at least in the beginning, indeed a new kind of organization. On the one hand, it emphasized the spontaneity of a 'light' organization. Everyone in the country could start a *Forza Italia*-club, of which there were soon over 14,000 (although the number of actual supporters was contested).⁵⁹ On the other hand, Berlusconi left little to chance. His own publishing company supported the organization and recruited candidates (also from its midst), his media outlets supported his campaign, and Berlusconi himself controlled everything—other candidates were not even supposed to print their images on campaign material. In a far-sighted move that showed understanding of the

⁵⁶ Cited with C. Clemens, 'A Few Bad Apples or a Spoiled Barrel? The CDU Party Finance Scandal Five Years Later', *German Politics and Society* 23.2 (2005), 72–87: 72.

⁵⁷ See for instance M. Donovan, 'The 1994 Election in Italy: Normalisation or Continuing Exceptionalism?', *West European Politics* 17.4 (1994), 193–201.

⁵⁸ S. Berlusconi, *Dichiarazione del 1994*, found at https://www.ansa.it/documents/1351097777949_Berlusconi_confronto.pdf.

⁵⁹ C. Golia, *Dentro Forza Italia. Organizzazione e militanza* (Venice: Marsilio, 1997), 48.

effects of the new electoral system that resulted from Segni's referenda, he forged an alliance with the Lega Nord in the north and with the National Alliance in the south, a party that had emerged from the neo-Fascists of the MSI. This coalition won a victory at the 1994 elections bringing to power not only newcomer Berlusconi but in his slipstream also these two parties which had been relegated to the political ghetto before 1994.⁶⁰

Berlusconi's quick rise to political stardom stunned many observers and left many of them very critical about his conflict of interests and judicial trials, but also on the choice of his political allies and the strong personalization of power that he embodied.⁶¹ In important aspects, Berlusconi made a radical break with the traditions of the people's party. *Forza Italia* endorsed the idea of 'clubs' of supporters and refuted traditional membership.⁶² Its electoral success was largely built on the person of Berlusconi himself, his position as a political outsider at a time when all politicians were suspect (sometimes literally), and his image as a self-made entrepreneur in a country where the state was seen as a problem rather than a solution. Ideologically, the movement broke with a tradition that ran through postwar Italian politics—the left and, to a lesser extent, the DC—namely to considerer parties as a democratic virtue and civil society as the source of destabilization. For Berlusconi, this was the other way around: civil society was the source of Italian renaissance, and parties (and the state more generally) should get out of the way.⁶³ Berlusconi's stint in government did not last long, as Bossi's Lega soon withdrew his support. But in the meantime, *Forza Italia* had been a true rupture in Italian politics and seemed to bring the tumultuous phase that had started two years earlier to some kind of conclusion: henceforward a left-wing coalition headed by the PDS opposed a right-wing coalition led by Berlusconi.

In other aspects, however, *Forza Italia*'s typical organization was perhaps less of a rupture than it seemed. Its idea of a light organization and a party as a 'club of supporters' was already heard among French Socialists. The notion of a party as a kind of open network centre where people of all convictions met—the SPD phrased it too. Berlusconi took the personalization of politics rather far, but other politicians in the 1980s, in particular his political mentor Craxi, had paved the way.⁶⁴ In other words, at least in this aspect, Berlusconi built on trends toward the open party that were already there. Towards the end of the decade, moreover, the differences between *Forza Italia* and more traditional people parties evaporated further. It held its first party congress in 1998, introduced formal

⁶⁰ Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents*, ch 9.

⁶¹ See for such a critique P. Ginsborg, *Silvio Berlusconi. Television, Power, and Patrimony* (London: Verso, 2004).

⁶² Golia, *Dentro Forza Italia*, 47–51.

⁶³ See for an insightful analysis of the place of Berlusconi in Italian history G. Orsina, *Il berlusconismo nella storia d'Italia* (Venice: Marsilio, 2013).

⁶⁴ Golia, *Dentro Forza Italia*, 165.

membership, and it joined the Christian Democrat group in the European parliament, where Berlusconi was heartily welcomed by Kohl and other prominent Christian Democrat politicians. Programmatically, the party exposed largely the same neo-liberal agenda that its sister parties put forward elsewhere.

Nonetheless, the face and substance of Italian politics changed remarkably over the course of the 1990s. The days of Christian Democrat politicians like Forlani and Andreotti were over and so was the idea of a party that counted on a massive membership base and fixed programmes of which the PCI had been the last relic. Its heir the PDS now also claimed to be an 'open party'. And even if *Forza Italia* fell somewhat in line with other parties, *berlusconismo* as a movement seemed to have the future not in the least because of its strong anti-party agenda, the promise to connect with sentiments of citizens ignored by the established parties and transform these into political deeds, and, of course, the towering figure of Berlusconi himself—without him there simply was no *Forza Italia*.⁶⁵

The fact that Berlusconi's first government fell so quickly confirmed many observers in their assumption that populism, because this was the prism through which Berlusconi was often viewed, was a temporary movement, unable to govern. It allegedly could not sustain its anti-system stance once it finally was in government, which meant that either its anti-system identity or its claim to government power should give way.⁶⁶ That remained very much to be seen when the decline of the people's parties continued, and it was often populist politicians who stood to gain, continuing to target the parties' preoccupation with government (and its alleged harmful consequences) and juxtaposing them with society that they, at least so they claimed, still understood and represented. They obviously did not shun hyperbole. For Haider, Austria was not a 'normal' Western democracy. The pact between ÖVP and SPÖ and their extensive control over the entire country from the social partners to the media to the education system rendered the country akin to a dictatorship—at least this was his accusation.⁶⁷ Not unlike Berlusconi, Haider found in the strength of civil society the perfect antidote against these politicians who allegedly looked down upon ordinary people.⁶⁸ This conviction was reflected in the party's organization—or the lack thereof. The surge in voters was hardly matched by an increase in members, and the party did not even try to counter this. The party trimmed down its own apparatus, abolishing even the post of 'party secretary', while a 1995 party reform erased the word 'party' from all the FPÖ's official documents (also formally changing the name in *die Freiheitlichen*), denoting it now as a 'civil movement'. Just like

⁶⁵ E. Poli, *Forza Italia. Strutture, leadership e radicamento territoriale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001), 87.

⁶⁶ P. Taggart, 'Populism and Representative Politics in Contemporary Europe', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9.3 (2004), 269–88.

⁶⁷ J. Haider, *Die Freiheit die ich Meine. Das Ende des Proporzstaates. Pläydoyer für die Dritte Republik* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1993).

⁶⁸ R. Wodak and A. Pelinka, *The Haider Phenomenon in Austria* (London: Routledge, 2001).

Berlusconi, Haider also caused a lot of controversy, mostly with harsh anti-immigrant statements and harrowing declarations on the Nazi past (lauding the 'sound employment policies' of Hitler and praising SS officers as 'decent people of good character'). But the party's main objective remained what it called the liberation of citizens from political parties. Controversies did not prevent the FPÖ from becoming the country's second biggest party at the 1999 elections, as both ÖVP and FPÖ achieved their worst result since 1945. ÖVP and FPÖ formed a government coalition the following year, a coalition that lasted six years and cast doubts over the claim that populists could not govern and that their surge was something temporary. Indeed, in 2001, Berlusconi returned to power in Italy, with a landslide victory. This time he was here to stay: his government became the longest in postwar Italian history.

By that time, at the start of the new millennium, the disintegration of the people's party vote became ever more widespread. Ever more countries that were believed somehow to be immune from the electoral fortunes of an outsider like Berlusconi or Haider were proved wrong.⁶⁹ And in every country, these politicians attacked the established parties on now familiar grounds. Ranging from Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands to the Danish People's Party, the argument was not solely that the leading parties had focused too much on governing, but that they had governed badly too.⁷⁰ However, the biggest shock of all came in France, when Le Pen reached the second round of the presidential elections in 2002.⁷¹ In fact, Le Pen only polled 1.8 per cent more votes than he had in the previous presidential elections. What enabled his qualification for the run-off were not so much his own gains, but the weakest performance ever of the main candidates of the two mainstream parties (36 per cent) since the establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958. These candidates, Chirac and Jospin, not by chance had spent the past years in power together as president and prime minister. Le Pen contradicted them in every possible way: with a harsh anti-Islam and anti-immigration stance, the promise to take France out of the European Union, the rejection of the social reforms of the government, right up to the promise to reintroduce capital punishment. Just like Haider, he also played with the country's dark past, adopting the Vichy slogan 'work, family, fatherland' because 'society could not function without them'. He managed to establish an 'even' support base across the country, sinking in no department below 10 per cent of the vote.⁷²

⁶⁹ This was for a time the view on Germany: F. Decker, 'Germany: Right-wing Populist Failures and Left-wing Successes', in: D. Albertazzi and D. McDonnel eds., *Twenty-First Century Populism. The Spectre of Western European Democracy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 119–134.

⁷⁰ J. M. Van Holsteyn and A. G. Irwin, 'Never a Dull Moment: Pim Fortuyn and the Dutch Parliamentary Election of 2002', *West European Politics* 26.2 (2003), 41–66.

⁷¹ J. Gaffney, ed., *The French Presidential and Legislative Elections of 2002* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁷² P. Buffotot and D. Hanley, 'The Normalisation of French Politics? The Elections of 2002', *Modern & Contemporary France* 11.2 (2003), 131–46: 135.

The breakthrough of the Front National at the 2002 French presidential elections was a shock that the swift and simple victory of Chirac at the second round could not erase. What lingered was the blow of the elimination of the Socialist candidate Jospin and the realization that the challengers of the Front National had won against one of the people's parties that had for decades run the Republic—just as these people's parties had suffered in Italy, Austria, the Netherlands, and so many other places. Of course, in every country, the challenge against these parties took a different shape. It could, but it did not need to, as Berlusconi showed, represent a challenge of the far right. But in every country these challengers attacked precisely what the people's parties considered their main asset: compromise, consensus, and stability, organized by the mediation and management of these parties themselves.

These virtues had seemed the winning values of the Cold War, praised endlessly in the early 1990s alongside references to the strength of parliamentary democracy and the vibrance of the free market. But by the end of the decade, even their main advocates feared that they lost appeal and that their concern with government and stability detached people's parties and citizens ever further. Indeed, as Kohl observed sharply, and somewhat self-critically, it was the 'unprecedented political stability that has contributed to the trend that ever more citizens merely watch politics as spectators'.⁷³ Just over a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall, little of the optimism that had characterized the beginning of the 1990s remained. At every lost election, with every country where the people's party lost ground, with every successful challenge to what they saw as their main achievements—the institutions of parliamentary democracy, management by political parties, social security reform, European integration—some of their confidence evaporated. The decline of the people's parties, almost a century after they began their ascent to mould the institutions and spirit of democracy to their image, had now definitely set in.

⁷³ Speech by Helmut Kohl CDU, 7. *Parteitag der Christlich Demokratischen Union Deutschlands, Karlsruhe, 16.–18. Oktober 1995* (Bonn: CDU, 1995), 26.

Epilogue

Democracy without People's Parties?

There are many ways to narrate the demise of the people's party since the early 2000s. One that evocatively captures how profound and structural their demise is is the perspective of political geography. Not, in this case, the geography of shifting voter alliances across national territories but rather the physical spaces that the people's parties occupy and the question what these symbolize about their position and prestige. The people's parties were traditionally housed in the heart of European capitals, proudly occupying *palazzi* and mansions that conveyed that they were pivotal in exercising the power of the state and that testified to their far-reaching influence over society. These party headquarters were the apex of a complex pyramid of local sections, regional party federations, and affiliate cultural and sports organizations. They were the symbolic home of thousands of members living across the entire country. But they were also the casual meeting place for bishops and businessmen, public administrators and presidents of employers' organizations, union leaders, ministers, and lobbyists. In short, the party headquarters epitomized the crucial place of people's parties in democracy: they were the junction where organization, participation and government met under the same roof—and their fancy facades and prime locations transmitted their high status to the outside world.

As such, the fact that parties were housed in cream-coloured historic buildings in the heart of European capitals was self-evident. Yet of that self-evidence little remains. The *Parti Socialiste* used to house in the seventh arrondissement of Paris. Their home was a 3,000-metre square historical palace, right across from the country's National Assembly and a short walk from the Elysée Palace—as if the party were always eyeing the seats of power. It recently moved to the eastern suburb of Ivry-sur-Seine, into a converted old warehouse where the paint is coming off the walls on the outside. Its new neighbours are a poke bowl restaurant and a scrap metal dealer.¹ When the PSI's party leaders in Rome looked outside of the window of their office, they saw traffic and pedestrians bustling all along the Via del Corso in downtown Rome. This is the old city's main artery, which connects the *Piazza del Popolo* with the *Vittoriano*, the huge white national

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/12/world/europe/france-socialists-home-paris.html>.

monument at the other end of the road. Looking down, the Socialist officials most likely also saw politicians and lobbyists making their way to the Italian parliament just a few blocks down the street, and their office was obviously a convenient stop along the way. The Socialist party no longer exists, and the former Socialist headquarters now houses the flagship store of a major sneaker company. Not far from Via del Corso, the DC occupied a sixteenth-century Baroque palace at Piazza del Gesù. This is now the seat of a foundation that fosters the training of workers to enhance business competitiveness. The list could go on. The Spanish *Partido Popular* announced it aimed to leave its historic office with its vast glass front at the Calle Génova in downtown Madrid to live up to its promise to 'regenerate' the party.² The Dutch Labour Party abandoned its seventeenth-century canal mansion, a former mayor residence on Amsterdam's Herengracht. That building now houses an e-commerce company, while the Labour Party rents a floor of a non-descript office building on the edge of town.

That the people's parties have abandoned, or rather have been forced to abandon, their headquarters in the heart of power is highly symbolic. It epitomizes how many people have, in turn, abandoned the parties too since the early 2000s. There have been a few minor and most of all temporary exceptions, such as the initiative of Sebastian Kurz to rebrand the ÖVP as the 'New People's Party' or the attempt of Matteo Renzi to reinvigorate the Democratic Party in Italy. Their success has evaporated as quickly as it emerged. Social Democrats, Gaullists, and Christian Democrats have not been able to turn the tide that was already slowly turning against them in the 1970s and 1980s. Their vote share has declined everywhere: from France where the Gaullists and Socialists have been steadily losing ground and where they were eliminated both in the first round of the presidential elections of 2017 and in those five years later (this time polling jointly a meagre 7 per cent); to the Netherlands where once all-mighty Social Democrats and Christian Democrats now jointly capture only about one in six votes; to Spain, where the PSOE and the Popular Party's share of the vote has about halved in the past two decades. Even in Germany, long considered immune to this trend, observers now talk about the possible 'end' of the people's parties.³ More than half of the people decided not to vote for either the CDU or the SPD at the parliamentary elections of 2021.

The challengers of the people's parties might well be, but do not need to be, of the populist right. Also others see the erosion of the people's parties and seize on the opportunities this offers. Emmanuel Macron sensed what he called the weakness of the Gaullists and Socialists and the desire for change among large

² https://www.elconfidencial.com/espana/2021-02-16/casado-anuncia-que-el-pp-deja-la-sede-de-genova-para-romper-con-el-pasado_2953291/

³ E. Jesse, 'Krise und (Ende?) der Volksparteien', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 26–7 (2021), found at <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/zustand-der-demokratie-2021/335443/krise-und-ender-volksparteien/>.

parts of the population in his presidential run in 2017. Macron's intuition was correct: both he and Marine Le Pen of the National Front went through to the second round, eliminating the parties that had run the Fifth Republic since 1958.⁴ The outsiders therefore became insiders, relegating the people's parties to the second plan. Something similar happened in Italy. The 2018 elections saw the Lega, which was rebranded from a regionalist into a right-wing populist party, and the maverick and eclectic Five Star Movement, which campaigned on a programme of anti-corruption, social security, and direct democracy, coming second and first. They even formed a government together, while the social democrats and *Forza Italia*, which led governments in Italy in alternation (or provided joint support for the technocratic government of Mario Monti) since the early 1990s, ended up in opposition.⁵

The changes sweeping Western European democracies obviously require a deeper understanding that goes beyond an explanation of the latest polls or election results. A long-term perspective such as has been offered in this book enables us to look beyond populism as the main cause of the uncertainties that plague today's democracies, but rather to see it as one of the effects of the demise of the people's party (which is not the same as to claim that the demise of the people's party is the only explanation for the electoral surge of populism). It also allows us to see that the people's party model is not the default option of democracy in Europe. It was rather only dominant for a short period of time. There is therefore no teleological reason why it should remain hegemonic or even why European countries would revert to it if they ever overcame the populist challenge—as is sometimes the suggestion. This suggestion harbours a certain nostalgia for this period of *les trente glorieuses*, while it neglects the fact that the people's party model of democracy was a child of its time, one that suffered when the historical conditions that brought it into force started to wane from the mid-1970s onwards.

Rather than speculating on its revival, a long-term perspective allows us to see that the prospects for revival of the people's party seem slim. It was precisely their ability to combine and balance between representing people from below, forging compromises in government, and defending the general interest that defined the people's parties and allowed them to make such a positive contribution to the stabilization of democracy after 1945. But it has become increasingly difficult to maintain the balance between these three elements. Regarding representation from below, most obviously the traditional constituencies of Catholics and

⁴ R. Kuhn, 'EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED: The 2017 French Presidential and Parliamentary Elections', *Modern & Contemporary France* 25.4 (2017), 359–75.

⁵ See G. Pasquino, ed., 'Special Issue: In the Eye of the Populist Storm: Not a Normal Election', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 23.4 (2018); N. Hewlett, 'The Phantom Revolution: The Presidential and Parliamentary Elections of 2017', *Journal of Modern and Contemporary France* 25.4 (2017), 377–90.

working class of the people's parties have progressively disintegrated and societies consisting of large subcultures have turned increasingly individualized, some would say atomized, and fluid. One could argue that representing diverse societies used to be exactly what the strength of people's parties was. Representation is mostly a process of 'claim-making' where certain politicians *claim* to speak for certain groups and, in this way, give that group an identity.⁶ The history of Socialist and Christian Democrat parties in the postwar decades perfectly underlines this. Indeed, it was the *claim* that despite differences in occupation, religion, or skill the working class formed a single and coherent group that boosted the success of Socialist parties, just as the Christian Democrats promised to represent 'employers and employees, farmers, shop keepers, civil servants, intellectuals, people from north and south, expellees and refugees',⁷ not to mention Catholics and protestants. Of course, all these groups formed a rather diverse collective, but they accepted the representative claims that people's party leaders made on their behalf.

In theory, this should provide opportunities for people's parties even now to make claims that could generate a lot of support. But while this is surely not impossible temporarily, opportunities to do so on a more structural basis have become smaller, because the social conditions that enabled the rise of the people's parties are no longer there. Western societies are ever more individualized and 'liquid' which makes the expression of common identities ever more difficult.⁸ Fluid societies tend to have fluid voter patterns.⁹ Uniting several groups, like Catholics and protestants or workers and peasants, was an easier task for party leaders than making claims that resonate with people in an individualized society in which identities, interests, and positions are in continuous flux. Moreover, the main response of party leaders of the people's party on the level of organization, the 'open party', confirmed and reaffirmed this trend toward liquification rather than providing an answer to it. It positioned the party organization primarily as a 'network' or the 'image' of society, a 'service centre' even, as it was called, that offered little orientation nor attempted to supersede the individualization. It suggested therefore that parties were superfluous when it came to organizing citizens and facilitating their political participation and offered little guidance in a world where the main ideological prisms—those of the people's parties themselves—were no longer there.

But there is another reason why the way in which people's parties represent complicate their revival. The representation of a particular group in a political

⁶ M. Saward, *The Representative Claim* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷ Adenauer, *Erinnerungen*, 52.

⁸ For the concept of a 'liquid' modernity, see Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

⁹ A. J. Drummond, 'Electoral Volatility and Party Decline in Western Democracies', *World Politics* 54.10 (2006), 628–47.

context by nature requires defining who belongs to the group and who does not. By representing, one defines insiders and outsiders, friends and enemies. The people's parties of the postwar era all claimed to be open to everyone—this is how they distinguished themselves from the pre-war mass parties of working class and Catholic origin. But even they, implicitly or explicitly, made this distinction between in- and outsiders, for instance in the strong anti-Marxist stance of the Christian Democrats or the pronounced anti-fascism of the Socialists. However, with their ever greater tendency to identify with the general interest and represent everyone, the ability to define who does not belong to the group has dwindled. The people's parties represent everyone and therefore no one, and are therefore particularly vulnerable to the volatility of the contemporary voter.

However, as mentioned, it is also the understanding by the people's parties of their governing role that complicates their possible revival. Since the Oil Crisis, the people's parties have become set on emphasizing their skills as governors more than anything else. The reasons for this seem not to be in the first place plain hunger for power.¹⁰ Rather, it was a combination of historical legacies and timing which informed this trend. These historical legacies consisted of the trauma of the first half of the century in which democracy had experienced such a profound crisis and the lessons which postwar politicians drew from this, namely that compromise, collaboration, and consensus (and a sense of responsibility) should be essential elements of party politics. These lessons counted especially in times of crises, which the 1970s certainly were in social, economic, and political terms. The decade saw the demise of the Keynesian and the rise of the neo-liberal paradigm, a paradigm which emphasized quick, efficient, and small government—'governability'—above anything else. And the leaders of the people's parties found a new purpose in providing this governability and in making the state 'governable' once again.

It is obvious that this has not paid off well, certainly not electorally. Still, the people's parties have persisted, at least partly because they felt it was their duty to persist. This has further upset the careful balance between the three elements that defined the people's party identity and success: representing broad-based social groups, forging compromises with adversaries in government, and facilitating political participation from below. Indeed, Christian Democrats and Socialists have responded to their own decline by emphasizing that they are essential to guarantee governability and stability—if needed together. Austria resorted to the 'Grand Coalitions' of the postwar era between 2007 and 2017. So did Germany from 2005–9 and again from 2013–21, always under the leadership of Angela Merkel. This coalition was historically seen as a democratic anomaly, something to be avoided at all costs. But since the 2000s, it has often become the standard

¹⁰ Mair, *Representative versus Responsible Government*, 5; Katz and Mair, 'Changing Models of Party Organization', 16.

option, defended in the name of the stability of German democracy. The word 'responsibility' featured prominently in Merkel's government declarations before the German parliament—although she also noted, unsurprisingly, that 'the SPD and the Union discovered so many principles that unify them' and that this was more than a coalition of necessity.¹¹ Sometimes, the need for stability was so high that these Grand Coalitions took the form of technocratic governments, where the major parties supported a government led by someone outside politics. This was the case in Austria, where the previous president of the country's Constitutional Court Brigitte Bierlein led a technocratic government, and thrice in Italy, with governments led by the former president of the Italian Central Bank Ciampi in the early 1990s European Commissioner Mario Monti, during the eurozone debt crisis, and by the former president of the European Central Bank Mario Draghi in the wake of the covid pandemic.

The way the people's parties opted to pool their resources in the service of stability shows how important securing governability has been for them. Given the huge challenges that European governments have faced since the 2000s (and are still facing)—a sovereign debt crisis, climate change, a pandemic, war in Europe—this is no minor achievement. Indeed, without them embracing governmental responsibility together and without their willingness to compromise and collaborate, democracy will inevitably suffer. However, the paradox is that the contrary of that statement also is true and this shows why precisely the balance between the three elements of the people's party was so important for the fate of democracy as such. Rightly the massive amount of energy and resources that the people's parties devote to government harbours risks. As Peter Mair has argued, this tends to undermine their capacity to represent concerns of many people that used to vote for these parties and to be perceptive to new themes emerging from below.¹² It tends to reinforce the trend for them to follow mostly the logic of government and to defend that logic to voters—rather than the logic of voters to those in government. Indeed, it tends to reinforce what the foremost political theorist Michael Saward has called 'statal representation': the tendency of parties to represent 'top down' the state and the 'operation of government' to the people rather than organize 'popular representation' bottom up, as parties used to do.¹³

Moreover, in the light of the rise of populism, the way people's parties have understood their purpose to govern has had a self-reinforcing effect. Their governing capacities are what characterizes the identity of the people's parties and what, in their eyes, sets them apart from challengers, most of all those of the

¹¹ Regierungserklärung von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel vor dem Deutschen Bundestag am 30. November 2005 in Berlin, found at <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/bulletin/regierungserklaerung-von-bundeskanzlerin-dr-angela-merkel-795782>.

¹² Mair, *Representative versus Responsible Government*.

¹³ M. Saward, 'Making Representations: Modes and Strategies of Political Parties', *European Review* 16.3 (2008), 271–86: 277.

populist right, which arguably cannot govern, or at least not, such is the argument, in a responsible way.¹⁴ At the same time, these populist challengers attack the people's parties because they fail to represent citizens from below, a claim which resonates with a significant part of the electorate. So, paradoxically, the stronger the populist challenge (and therefore the perceived failure to represent of people's parties) is, the greater the threat to stable government and the more the people's parties emphasize their governing capacities (and therefore the more difficult to represent the concerns of citizens from below). So, in other words, the tension between representation and governing that was once bridged and balanced by the people's party is now magnified, with the people's parties embodying government, and their challengers claiming to represent citizens. This is what Mair noted in one of his final publications, namely that 'the two functions that were once combined by party [sic] have begun to grow apart', as the expression of social demands 'becomes the property ... of the new opposition ... often characterized by a strong populist rhetoric'.¹⁵

The prospects for a revival of the people's party therefore seem meagre at best. And as they decline, European party systems are undergoing a remarkable make-over. One could argue, of course, that changing party systems are simply what they are: changing party systems. In that scenario the demise of the people's party has no meaning beyond these parties themselves. Still, the history of the twentieth century suggests otherwise. For much of that century the strength and prospects of the people's parties served as a bellwether for the health of democracy as such. The political reforms after the First World War not only installed universal (male) suffrage, but the Socialist and Catholic parties also made clear, in electoral regulations, parliamentary orders, and the process of government formation, that mass democracy required mass parties. These mass parties were often already there, born earlier to represent, rally, and emancipate marginalized groups. But it was their failure to transform into people's parties that played an important role in the destabilization of democracy, while the transformation of these parties into people's parties after 1945 was central to the stabilization of democracy. Sure, external constraints such as the Cold War and steep economic growth were extremely important too. But it is hard to imagine how the renaissance of democracy could have been achieved without the capacity of people's parties to represent and govern at the same time, uniting broader and previously antagonistic groups in their ranks and striking compromises. Precisely the balance that the people's parties managed to strike between representing various groups from below, striking compromises, and providing governmental stability was lost

¹⁴ P. Taggart, 'Populism and the Pathology of Representative Politics', in Y. Mény and Y. Surel, eds, *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 62–80.

¹⁵ Mair, *Representative versus Responsible Government*, 5, 17.

progressively from the second half of the 1970s onwards—notwithstanding initiatives to ‘open’ their parties to a society that was ever more secular and individualized.

Looking at it through the perspective of the history of the twentieth century, the demise of the people’s parties implies more than the electoral decline of these parties. It does not merely reflect changes within party systems, with democracy as the same wallpaper that still colours the background while only the furniture is being rearranged. Rather, with the demise of the people’s parties, the whole building is being restructured. Because these parties were so crucial in making, breaking, and stabilizing democracy over the course of the past century, they have defined to a large extent what many of us mean when we talk about democracy (and, perhaps even more important, what we mean when we talk about what, or who, is not democratic). This is what people like Tingsten meant when they said that democracy emerged as a kind of ‘super-ideology’ in the postwar decades.¹⁶ Democracy was a ‘super-ideology’ in a philosophical sense, because virtually all politicians called themselves democrats and understood roughly the same by it. But it was also the case in a formal sense. The predecessors of today’s party leaders created a great part of the formal and informal institutional framework of our democracies: they designed the electoral systems, wrote party regulations, initiated public funding of parties, and proclaimed parliamentary orders that all sanctioned the place of parties in modern democracy. Moreover, they were at times the authors of the constitutions—the German Basic Law of 1949, the constitution of the French Fifth Republic, the Italian constitution of 1948, even the Austrian constitution of 1919. All these institutions proclaimed the democratic values of these parties to be the values of democracy as such. However, institutions are not merely the formal and written rules of the democratic game. They can also be informal and verbal, much closer to customs of accepted behaviour and shared values. Also in this sense the people’s parties defined what was to be understood with democracy. And, also in this perspective, democracy as it was practised informally reflected the people’s party’s own virtues: collaboration, compromise, and consensus among different groups under the firm guidance of a few leaders, who understood politics mostly as ‘administration’ and warned against the perils of ideological conflict. And these values also found expression in other institutions of the people’s parties, like planning commissions, the social partnership, and other corporatist institutions.

Since the main protagonists (Christian Democrats, Socialists, Gaullists) agreed on the rules of the democratic game, formal and informal, spoken and unspoken, these rules were beyond contestation. They were indeed ‘super-ideology’, as Tingsten observed in the 1960s, in the sense that they were considered ‘above’

¹⁶ Tingsten, *The Problem of Democracy*, 195.

ideology, because they should not become the topic of political contestation. Scholars of democracy have by and large followed this logic. Often, some nostalgia for the postwar decades is obvious; some even talk about that era as the 'golden age' of democracy.¹⁷ But even without being so explicit, many imply that not a particular form of democracy but democracy itself is about to 'die' or 'end', or that we are living in the 'twilight' of democracy or that 'the people' have turned against 'democracy'.¹⁸

However deeply we might be concerned about some political trends, democracy is far from a static political system that can be saved only by trying to preserve what we have already or seeking to go back to what we have lost since the 1970s. Even if this somewhat conservative stance is informed very much by history, for scholars just as for politicians it is paradoxically a deeply ahistorical point of view. However much one might like to control the debate on what the boundaries of the democratic are, as all generations of postwar people's party leaders preferred to do, it denies that it lies in the very essence of democracy that it is the self-reflective way of thinking about politics *par excellence*.¹⁹ Unlike authoritarian regimes, which cannot question themselves without undermining the entire basis of their rule, precisely here lies the strength of democracy. It can, and by nature should, continuously rethink and reconsider, and always be open to the possibilities of reforming itself, for better or worse. This is why democracy does not run in a straight line of linear progress—as its twentieth-century history finely, but also agonizingly, illustrates. It is, however, able to learn from its mistakes, errors, and traumas—and the twentieth century is a good illustration of that too, fortunately.

However, precisely in its determination to learn from the 1920s and 1930s trauma of polarization and instability, some of these qualities for self-reform were lost in the last couple of decades. Despite recurring critique on the functioning and legitimacy of democratic institutions, the people's parties' politicians did not really and seriously consider reforming or innovating them. Such critique of these institutions (and, indeed, of the parties themselves) was often dismissed, at best, as unrealistic and impracticable, or at worst as critique on democracy as such—and therefore as anti-democratic and illegitimate. Despite the fact that over the past decades ever more citizens seem to lose faith in the institutions that the people's parties design, embody, and identify with—whether visible in alarmingly

¹⁷ C. S. Maier, 'Democracy since the French Revolution', in J. Dunn, ed., *Democracy: The Unfinished Journey 508 BC–1993 AD* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 125–52: 138; Stone, *Goodbye to All of That?*, ch. 1 and ch. 3; K. Jährausch, *Out of Ashes. A New History of Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), ch. 15.

¹⁸ Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*; Runciman, *How Democracy Ends*; Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy*; Mounk, *The People versus Democracy*. For an insightful critique on this tendency see also G. Orsina, 'Political Science as a Modernist Project', in C. Domper Lasús and G. Priorelli, eds, *Combining Political History and Political Science* (London: Routledge, 2022), 126–40.

¹⁹ Corduener, *The Problem of Democracy*, 167.

low trust in parliament and parties, declining turnout at elections, or increasing votes for what is then called 'anti-system parties'—the institutions that the people's parties designed and called the institutions of democracy *as such* are still considered 'above ideology'. Instead of reform, parties have fallen into the trap of what the Italian scholar Pietro Scoppola called the 'paradox of institutional reform': reforming the institutions could cost the parties some of their power, which is why they postpone reforms, which made the need for reforms ever more urgent and the potential losses of the parties even greater, and, hence, makes their reluctance to reform greater still.²⁰

This strategy could perhaps be afforded while the people's parties were still strong. But now as they lose their strength the institutions of democracy that they built and embodied are exposed for what they are. They are neither perennial nor impenetrable, nor are they 'above ideology'. They are, as all political institutions, children of their time—and vulnerable children at that. They were the fruit of the commitment of people's parties to the notion that democracy could not survive based on the winner-takes-all principle, but only with a division of influence and shared understanding of the rules of the democratic game. But many challengers of the people's parties see these democratic institutions neither as impartial nor as being rightly and justly divided between different spheres of interest. They see them as biased and controlled by elites, allegedly indicative of the way democratic decision-making has become detached from ordinary people. In other words, by having refused to initiate the reform of democracy and to make its institutions once again in tune with the times, the people's parties now risk losing control over the reform process, while their challengers no longer talk about reform but revolution.

Of course, the self-styled revolutionaries of today are far from the innocent victims of the allegedly biased people's parties' institutions that they claim to be, however much they would like people to believe that. Moreover, the alternatives that they have in mind might prove to be a cure that is much worse than the disease. Still, the fact that they gain political support by exploiting the feelings of increasingly large groups of citizens who feel that many of the institutions (political as well as economic) of today's democracies do not work for them does not mean that these feelings are not justified. Nor does it mean that this exploitation can best be confronted by invoking in existentialist terms the perils of these revolutionaries in government and then hope voters will fall in line. There have been too many surprises in recent years—the election of Donald Trump and Brexit come to mind first—to trust that such a strategy will pay off in the long run.²¹

²⁰ Scoppola, *La repubblica dei partiti*, 430.

²¹ See for a reflection on this perspective Orsina, 'Political Science as a Modernist Project'.

For the past decades, people in Western Europe have only known one kind of democracy, namely people's party democracy. But history shows that this is not some kind of default model of democracy to which Europeans will simply revert if the current sentiment of crisis is overcome. The question is therefore not so much whether the people's party will survive. It is not even whether democracy will survive the demise of the people's party. The question is rather how democracy will be adapted to the post-people's party era and who will decide what that re-adaptation will look like. With the demise of the people's party people in Western Europe are moving into unchartered territory and must find new ways, organizations, and institutions to reconcile the need to genuinely express concerns of citizens with the imperative to avoid toxic polarization and the necessity to provide stable governments all at the same time. And that seems to be biggest paradox of democracy today: the people's parties of the last century cannot be resurrected, but some of their unique qualities in providing precisely these balances are still badly needed in our own time.

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