

## Party government: myth or reality?

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# Party Government: Myth or Reality?

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## **Party Government: Myth or Reality?**

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## Abstract

The question of the relationship between parties and the governments which they support has not so far been given the attention it deserves. This is surprising from both a normative and an empirical standpoint. The reasons why this question has not been studied so far have probably to do with the notion, held unconsciously but also strongly, that the problem is a simple one. As with all matters which are understudied, there is some tendency to simplify and in this case to believe that parliamentary government, in Western Europe at least, *is* party government. Yet, as one looks more closely at the problem, the simplicity of the answer begins to vanish. What we therefore need to do, first, is to examine what the expression 'party government' really means. This examination will begin to raise in our minds questions about the validity of the 'idealised concept' of party government. This will lead us to adopt a more sedate view of what party government consists of as well as to notice that there are substantial variations in the content of party government in different countries.

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Rather surprisingly, the question of the relationship between parties and the governments which they support has not so far been given the attention it deserves. This is surprising from both a normative and an empirical standpoint. It is rather curious that there should not have been a desire to know better how parties interfaced with governments; it is also surprising that the normative question should not have been discussed, especially since executive-legislative relations have been a major area of inquiry: this topic can be regarded as parallel to but in part superseded by, at least in cabinet systems, the question of government-party relationships. For, in contemporary democracies, one of the major questions to be answered is surely how close should the link be between government and supporting parties. Is the executive to be composed of men and women chosen and tightly controlled by the party? Are the policies which that executive pursues to originate from the party or parties supporting the government? These are major questions for democratic governments which must be discussed alongside empirical problems, such as efficiency and effectiveness, which need of course also to be raised.

The reasons why these questions have not been studied so far have probably to do with two somewhat contradictory points. One is the long-standing dislike of parties: although criticisms have now been toned down, to be sure, there is still in many quarters a lingering view that parties play an 'excessive' part in government. The other point is the notion, held unconsciously but also strongly, that the question is a simple one. As with all matters which are understudied, there is some tendency to simplify and in this case to believe that parliamentary government, in Western Europe at least, *is* party government. Since electors vote for parties and only incidentally for individuals, except in the case of party leaders, and since parties are involved in the government formation process, the conclusion that the government is party government seems inescapable. This view is reinforced by the fact that parties are fairly stable, at least have been stable until recently in Western Europe, and that they are disciplined. Thus the government is composed of party men and women who can count on the loyalty of their parliamentary supporters. If this is not party government, what is and what can it be?

Yet, as one looks more closely at the problem, the simplicity of the answer begins to vanish. For instance, to what extent are the parties which support a government truly involved in the life of that government? One knows of many cases in which these parties are on the contrary rather distant from the making of policies. As a matter of fact, would it be such a good thing for these parties to be too closely involved? Thus we may not be so sure in practice of what we mean, or wish to mean, when we speak of party government.

What we therefore need to do, first, is to examine what the expression 'party government' really means. This examination will begin to raise in our minds questions about the validity of the 'idealised concept' of party government. This will lead us to adopt a more sedate view of what party government consists of as well as to notice that there are substantial variations in the content of party government in different countries.

# I.

## 1. What Party Government Consists of

Our first task is therefore to be more precise about what constitutes party government. To do so, conceptual difficulties surrounding the expression have to be overcome. Some definitions are not helpful. For instance, one cannot be satisfied with one which states that party government is “that form of societal conflict regulation in which a plurality of democratically organised political parties play a relatively dominant role both in the socio-political mediation sphere and in the actual process of political decision-making (government sphere)”<sup>1</sup>. Such a ‘definition’ (if the word applies in this case) says little that can be useful for practical purposes: what is a ‘relatively dominant role’ is manifestly highly debatable. Moreover, the definition seems to assume that a government is *either* party *or* non party, which is not always the case, would it only be because in some governments ministers may or may not belong to parties.

Perhaps the most systematic effort to define the concept has been that of R.S. Katz who has developed an incremental idea of ‘party-ness of government’ as well as of ‘party governmentness’ in an essay entitled ‘Party government: a rationalistic conception’<sup>2</sup>. He mentions three conditions which have to be fulfilled for a government to deserve the title, so to speak, of ‘party government’. These are, first, that “all major governmental decisions must be taken by people chosen in elections conducted along party lines, or by individuals appointed by and responsible to such people”, second, that “policy must be decided within the governing party, when there is a ‘monocolour’ government, or by negotiation among parties when there is a coalition”, and, third, that “the highest officials (e.g. cabinet ministers and especially the prime minister) must be selected within their parties and be responsible to the people through their parties”.<sup>3</sup> R.S. Katz then goes on to note that this definition “represents an ideal type, rather like but in contrast to Dahl’s (1971) type of polyarchy. As such, it represents an extreme that may be approximated but is neither realised nor realisable in the ultimate sense. It is also a multidimensional concept. Thus a particular system may closely approximate the ideal type in one respect but not in another”.<sup>4</sup> R.S. Katz’s analysis shows therefore that the problem of defining party government is complex; equally interestingly, it also suggests that one should look for ‘types’ of party government. It is somewhat imprecise on one point, admittedly, namely on the determination of what constitute “major governmental decisions”; but it has the great merit of stressing that a very important link is provided by individuals in the context of policy development. The interpretation does not posit that all the policies adopted by governments must have been adopted previously by supporting parties: it suffices that they be approved “within the government party”, a somewhat less rigid expression. Whether this flexibility was indeed deliberate cannot be discovered from the context; but it is consistent with the general tone of the approach which places government members in a central position.

1 A. Mintzel and H. Schmitt (1981) ‘How to investigate the future of party government’ (unpublished), quoted in R.S. Katz, ‘Party Government: A Rationalistic Conception’, F.G. Castles and R. Wildenmann, eds., *op.cit.* (1986), p. 42

2 R.S. Katz, ‘Party Government: A Rationalistic Conception’, in F.G. Castles and R. Wildenmann, eds., *Visions and Realities of Party Government* (1986) Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 42 and foll

3 *ibid*, p. 43.

4 *ibid*, p. 44

## 2. The Direction of Influence

Katz's analysis further suggests that we have to examine more closely the characteristics of party government-relationships. This means taking into account two broad sets of questions which were traditionally ignored. One is the question of the *direction* of the influence; the other is that of the *planes* on which this influence takes place.

The question of the direction of the influence needs to be raised because governments, far from being always the 'obedient servants' of parties, can and often do, on the contrary, supervise and even control these parties. Admittedly, in principle, the concept of party government does not in itself rule out the possibility for the relationship of influence to go from governments to parties as well as from parties to governments; but the fact that the influence could take place in both ways seems overlooked as the idea of party-government appears based on the assumption, somewhat naive perhaps and almost certainly ideologically-grounded, according to which parties are *the* source of the influence. This view appears ideological as it stems in part from neo-corporatist models and indeed from marxist models according to which the government is the last element of a chain which goes from the socio-economic environment to political decision-making.<sup>5</sup> We do not need here to go into the reasons why such a view is likely to be mistaken: it suffices to point out that that it is a hypothesis and, as a result, needs to be tested and not assumed. We must therefore see whether there are cases in which governments influence the parties which support them as well as cases in which supporting parties influence governments.

By broadening the approach in this way, however, we discover two important consequences. First, as there can be both types of influence, they can both occur at the same time: there can therefore be (and indeed there is likely to be) reciprocal influence of governments on supporting parties as well as of supporting parties on governments over the same question. This may result in both types of influence being so evenly balanced that they cancel each other out. Hence the further conclusion that there may well be, in some cases, true autonomy between parties and governments, as each side realises that it cannot force the other to accept its wishes.

Thus the idea of party government contains within itself, so to speak, 'the seeds of its own destruction': a party-government relationship must also include the possibility for parties and governments to 'declare a truce' and go about their own business 'independently'.

## 3. The three Planes of Party-Government Relationships

The direction of influence can therefore vary in party-government relationships; this influence is also exercised on the different planes on which governments and parties relate to each other. These planes are independent from each other, but, in part at least, they also intersect each other.

There are three planes on which parties and governments can interact, although the literature has tended to concentrate on two of them. Indeed, there has even sometimes been emphasis on one plane only, that of the allocation of portfolios among the various parties, the underlying assumption being that the main way in which parties intervene in the governmental

<sup>5</sup> F. Lehner and K. Schubert, 'Party Government and the Political Control of Public Policy', *EJPR*, (1984), vol. 12, 131-46, p. 134



process is through *the composition of the government*: parties want to achieve 'power' and membership of the government is the way to fulfil this aim; moreover, it is in any case easier to measure the involvement of parties in government if the key indicator is the number of ministers of these parties. This approach is justifiable: participation in a government appears to give a party a substantial opportunity to have a say in decision-making.

Yet there are difficulties if this approach is adopted. Some ministers may be more powerful than others, to begin with: in a coalition a party may be at a disadvantage as a result. Furthermore, it is dangerous to rely on the proportion of ministers held by a party in a government to assess the power of that party: a study relating to the influence of the FDP in the German government provides clear evidence that that party has been disproportionately successful in seeing its policies adopted. Finally, some governments are supported by parties which do not participate in it: in such a case the pay-off for the party is constituted by policies and only by policies. Thus to be realistic, one cannot merely take into account the composition of the government; one has to examine policies and government-party relationships have to be assessed separately on these two planes.

Indeed, a third plane needs to be considered, that of patronage, which, in some countries at least, plays an important part, although that part is typically difficult to measure. It is in reality also difficult to determine precisely what constitutes patronage. In some cases, favours may be regarded as being 'policies', applying to some groups or some areas only, admittedly, but of the same kind as the national policies which parties put forward; some national policies are even occasionally regarded as 'bribes' designed to capture segments of the electorate. Yet, by and large, patronage relates to small numbers of individuals or to specific districts, typically in order to obtain electoral support. These favours are indeed conceived as different from party policies by the parties themselves, since they are often asked for in secret or at least have an 'unofficial' character. Patronage must therefore be regarded as forming a distinct plane of government-supporting party relationships.

Indeed, one must view patronage as a distinct plane of government-supporting party relationships precisely because, being typically secret and ostensibly unacceptable, the extent to which it takes place or is tolerated varies markedly from country to country. Where the political culture considers patronage as interfering in an unwarranted manner with the 'proper' working of administrative bodies, it tends to be restricted and, at the limit, may only exist on a minute scale. In other countries, on the contrary, it may take place on a large scale.

Where it does exist, on the other hand, its main function is to help the decision-making process. It can help parties to ensure the loyalty of their supporters; it can also help governments to put pressure on parties. By giving favours to individual party members of a particular district, a government may ensure the continued support of the party members in that district: its proposals may therefore be more readily accepted. Admittedly, patronage is not the only mechanism by which trade-offs occur: for instance a party may be prepared to receive relatively few ministerial posts in exchange for policies which the government is prepared to implement. Trade-offs occur also within the plane of policies, both among the parties and between the government and the parties which support this government. There is thus a continuous series of exchange arrangements characterising government-supporting party relationships; but patronage is an important element in this ongoing relationship and it needs to be examined on its own right.

## II.

### 4. The Marked Limits of the Influence of Parties on Governments

While examining the ways in which governments and supporting parties interact, we noticed some of the ways in which governments exercise influence on these supporting parties or find means of reducing the impact of these parties on them. This means that we have come to discover that there are marked limits to the influence which supporting parties exercise in practice on governments, even in parliamentary systems, although these systems are typically regarded as those which are most likely to give rise to party government. To appreciate better what the limits of party influence can be, let us consider a little more closely the situation on the three planes on which, as we just saw, government-supporting party relationships take place, appointments, policy-making, and patronage.

First, with respect to appointments, one serious limitation to the role of parties come from the fact that ministers are often not appointed by party representatives as such: in many countries, in Britain for instance, it is the prime minister who selects the ministers, not the party. Admittedly, in the British case, there is so to speak a 'transfer' to the government of the (parliamentary) party elite when a party comes to power after winning an election; but, even then, the prime minister has some leeway and this leeway increases as time passes. In other countries, the limitation of the role of parties is sometimes due to another reason, namely the fact that some ministers are chosen from outside the ranks of the party, for instance from among civil servants or businessmen.

Second and similarly, the role of parties may be limited with respect to patronage, as this may or may not be distributed by the party itself. It may be distributed, in part at least, by the members of the government who may follow their own inclinations rather than party instructions. The party may be helped in the process, but more as a passive instrument than as an actor.

Third, the role of parties may also be markedly restricted with respect to policy-making. Admittedly, when a new government is formed, especially after a general election, this government tends to follow the party programme or, if a coalition has to be formed, the government programme stems from the programmes of the coalition parties. Yet, even then, aspects of the party programme may be toned down or some proposals may be delayed. Moreover, some proposals may have been included in the party programme at the request of ministers and not of the rank-and-file. Finally, the influence of the government on governmental policy-making tends to increase over time: circumstances induce ministers to inflect, modify, indeed sometimes entirely alter the policies which had been originally contemplated: examples of complete 'U-turns' even occur occasionally. In such cases, parties are often presented with a *fait accompli*.

### 5. Factors Accounting for Variations in the 'Partyness' of Governments

Why, then, do limitations in the influence of parties on governments occur and why do they vary across countries? Although our knowledge is still limited and it is impossible to be really precise, one can at least note the influence of five broad types of factors which increase or reduce the hold which parties may have on governments. These are the institutional

framework, the party system, the structure of parties, the nature of leadership, and the characteristics of the policies themselves.

#### a) The Institutional Framework

National institutions are likely to have an effect on government-supporting party relationships, as the link between parties and governments may be more or less close depending on whether these institutions give or not direct authority to some members of the executive. Presidents in presidential systems such as that of the United States enjoy such direct authority: they can therefore exercise personal influence independently from parties. A somewhat similar situation occurs in those parliamentary systems in which the head of State has substantial political authority of his or her own, as in France or Finland; this can also occur where the head of the government, as in Britain or Germany, is granted significant personal authority by custom or as a result of constitutional provisions. In all these cases, government-party relationships are affected. For instance, the part played by the British prime minister in relation to appointments is substantial, because the superior status of the British prime minister is recognised in practice; for the same reason the British prime minister exercises considerable influence on the policy plane.

#### b) Party Systems

The character of government-party relationships is also likely to be affected by the type of party system. The way members of governments are appointed, the decision-making processes, even the existence and nature of patronage will vary as a result. The impact is indirect, but it is strong: the impact is indirect in that governments will typically be of a majority single-party character, of a minority single party character, or be based on a coalition as a result of the party system. Let us therefore consider these three types of government in turn.

In single party majority governments, typically to be found in two-party systems, as in Britain, or in systems of more than two parties where one party is dominant, for instance in Sweden and, in earlier decades, Norway, the government plays a considerable part in policy elaboration; this is also the case in coalitions with a dominant party. Admittedly, the sole or major party comes to office with a programme, typically adopted previously by the party executive or the national conference; but over time the influence of the government grows. The same obtains with respect to the composition of the government and of the top party elite: originally, members of the government emerge from the party, and indeed from senior elements in the party: there is then a true *fusion* between the membership of the government and of the party elite; over time, this fusion works to the benefit of the government rather to that of the party elite. Finally, patronage tends to be limited: the cohesion of the party and the national character of the electoral contests make the distribution of favours on a large scale less necessary.

The characteristics of most other coalition governments are different. In most coalitions, membership of the government is typically decided by top party representatives: the names of ministers are sometimes simply forwarded to the prime minister. Patronage is often widespread, in large part because each party needs to ensure that it keeps the loyalty of its supporters. Finally, party representatives have a major say in governmental policy-making: the influence of these representatives is typically exercised by means of a governmental compact, often very detailed, by which the parties determine in advance the line which the government is to take on most, if not all, issues.

Minority single party (and minority coalition) governments constitute intermediate cases. First, only the party (or parties) represented in the government play a part in determining the composition of that government: there is thus only partial party influence at this level. Second, what begins by a substantial amount of party dominance on policy elaboration (including by the parties supporting the government from outside) gradually gives way to a substantial degree of governmental initiative and indeed even of governmental autonomy, partly reminiscent of constitutional presidential systems: the government proposes policies and attempts to obtain support for these policies among the coalition partners. Party dominance is therefore limited: an 'arms length' situation prevails. The extent of patronage is also intermediate. There is usually more patronage than when there is single party majority government but less than where there are coalitions.

### c) Party Structure and Ideology

Internal party characteristics also have an impact on government-supporting party relationships. First, the *ideology* of the parties has an effect, as parties of the Left are more likely to want to intervene in the life of the government which they support than parties of the Right: such 'interference' is viewed on the Left as a manifestation of 'democratic participation'.

Second, the *general characteristics* of the party can also be expected to have an impact. On the one hand, 'mobilising' parties are set up in order to increase the dominant role of the leadership, which can be the leadership of the party (in the case of many Communist parties) or the leadership of the government (in the case of well-organised parties of the authoritarian Right): the party rank-and-file may have little to say. On the other hand, 'representative' parties seem more likely to attempt to influence governments; but the fact that they have a large social base does not automatically provide them with such an influence, as these parties may be so decentralised and divided that they are unable to affect the government *as parties*; only elements in their midst may put pressure and have influence: this is the case, for instance, with American parties.

Finally, the specific *party structure* also has an effect on government-party relationships. In parties which are 'cohesive', decisions are taken primarily at the top, though there may be some consultation of the rank-and-file. Some parties have two power centres, often partly overlapping, admittedly, typically the parliamentary group and the national executive: the government may play on divisions between these two bodies. There are also factionalised or geographically-divided parties: in these cases, decisions taken by the party leadership may be challenged locally; there may not even be party positions as such and the government may be better able to determine its policy autonomously as a result, though it may not be able to see its views eventually prevail. There are thus two contradictory consequences of party structure: on the one hand, the more cohesive the party is, the more it is able to exercise influence as a party; on the other hand, the more the party displays cohesion, the more the government is able to exercise influence mainly by controlling the top of the organisation.

In reality, where parties have little cohesion, there is no real opportunity for either party dominance or for government dominance. There would then seem to be autonomy for the government and for the party; indeed it is not so much the party as such which is autonomous, since this expression covers little reality in such a case: the autonomous agents are the party 'chieftains' who can exercise influence, often because they are members of the legislature. The case of the French Fourth Republic approximated this situation.

#### d) Leadership

Three types of leaders are particularly relevant, those who are governmental leaders only, those who are party leaders only, and those who combine governmental and party leadership. The first type includes presidential chief executives who come to power on the basis of popular, rather than party support, as well as heads of governments appointed by a president elected by popular vote (French prime ministers in the Fifth Republic, for instance) and prime ministers in a coalition context. These leaders wish to strengthen the role of the government over that of the party: they therefore stress one or both of the need for national cohesion and the managerial or technical role of the government. On both grounds, these leaders will try to diminish the dependence of the government on parties.

Party leaders who are not government leaders naturally have the opposite objective: they want to ensure that the interdependence between government and party is maximised and that this interdependence is exercised to the benefit of the party. As party leaders exercise their influence indirectly largely through the ministers of their party, they may attempt to remove many policy matters from the governmental area. Ultimately, the power of party leaders in coalition situations rests mainly on manipulation and on the threat of bringing down the government.

Third, leaders who are both government and party leaders have the greatest resources, but they can exploit this situation differently. They have a choice between two broad options: they can push government-party relationships in the direction of governmental dominance: this may lead to discontent in the party. They can attempt to realise an equilibrium between party and government by balancing the 'political' demands of the party against the 'technical' demands of the government. This is likely to be the more effective strategy in the long run.

#### e) Policy Fields

Government-supporting party relationships may also vary across policy fields, but probably more because of differences in process than because of the substance of decisions. Thus, while foreign affairs are generally regarded as belonging to the governmental rather than to the party 'area', some issues, such as those related to the European Community, have been hotly debated in most Western European parties; the same has been true, in some countries at least and in particular in Britain, of issues related to nuclear disarmament. Specifically, parties seem to be less involved in three types of situations, *emergencies*, *technical matters* and *implementation*. These situations may even be regarded as secondary by parties: as a result governments are often able to acquire some autonomy in this respect by default.

The limitations to the influence exercised by parties on governments (and, to an extent of the influence which governments can exercise on parties) can therefore be severe, even in parliamentary systems. What we find is a large variety of types of party government: the truth about party government is thus that there are many facets or realities of what is basically an umbrella concept.

### III.

#### 6. The many Realities of 'Party Government': The Space of Party Government Relationships

Since there are many types of party-government, it is natural that we should look for means of classifying them. Reflection on similarities and differences suggests that such a classification can be based on two broad dimensions which might be labelled the dimension of *autonomy v. interdependence*, on the one hand, and, on the other, when there is interdependence, the dimension of the *direction of the dependence*.

First, government-supporting party relationships vary according to the extent to which the government and the supporting party or parties are *autonomous from each other*. There are obviously degrees here: there may be autonomy in some fields and dependence in others or there may be autonomy on one plane (appointments for instance) and interdependence on another (policy-making for instance).

Second, where there is interdependence between governments and supporting parties, this interdependence can vary from one extreme of *total dependence* of the government on the supporting party or parties to the other extreme of total dependence of the party or parties on the government. There is a dimension here as parties have often been set up with a view to helping governments and in particular leaders to maintain and even increase their hold on a nation: such parties are dependent on the government, although the extent of this dependence will vary both from country to country and over time in the same country. Admittedly, this dimension appears to be relevant only if parties and governments are not autonomous from each other: in practice, as the question of autonomy arises on each of the planes of which parties and governments relate to each other, it is right to refer to a two-dimensional space in order to define the nature of government-party relationships in individual countries at various moments in time.

This space is best represented by a triangle in which one side constitutes the 'direction of dependence' axis while the other two sides join each other at the autonomy end of the 'autonomy-interdependence' dimension and at the middle point with respect to the 'direction of dependence' dimension. This is another way of saying that the two dimensions are analytically interconnected since one is a condition of the other, but also that, given the ambiguous character of real-world relationships between governments and supporting parties, the two dimensions remain distinct in practice.

The location of countries with respect to the two dimensions is determined by the relationships between the governments and the supporting parties with respect to the three sets of activities which were described earlier. Let us consider how given positions are occupied on the plane of appointments, for instance. Countries in which governments are appointed separately from parties and where governments do not interfere or interfere very little with the composition of the party leadership will tend to be located towards the top of the triangle, near the autonomy end of the 'autonomy-interdependence' dimension. Countries in which the party appoints the ministers but where the ministers do not affect the composition of the party leadership group are located towards the bottom right-hand corner of the triangle near the interdependence end of the 'autonomy-interdependence' dimension and near the 'party dominant' end of the 'direction of dependence' dimension. Where the government has set up a party whose top leadership group it controls while the membership of the

government remains independent from the party, the country is located also close to the interdependence end of the 'autonomy-interdependence' dimension, but near the government-dominant end of the 'direction of dependence' dimension, that is to say towards the bottom left-hand corner of the triangle. Similar remarks can be made about the location of countries in the space with respect to policy-making and to patronage. To obtain an overall picture of the location of countries in the triangle, party-government relationships with respect to the three planes have naturally to be taken jointly into account.

## 7. Broad Patterns of Party-Government Relationships

We can now turn to specific examples of types of party government. In general, given the fact that the position of a country overall is based on the location of that country on all three planes, positions at the three corners of the triangle are unlikely to be often occupied; but positions in the area of these three corners are likely to be. Near the top corner are governments which are autonomous with respect to parties (as well as, conversely, of parties which are autonomous with respect to governments): this situation corresponds to a form of 'separation' between the two sets of bodies. This is likely to occur primarily where the executive has a source of legitimacy of its own, as in some monarchical systems where the government has a 'bureaucratic' character (there were examples in 19th century Central Europe); this also occurs in some presidential systems, if the 'party' of the president is in effect sharply distinct from the 'party' which nominally supports the president in the legislature, a case which approximates that of the United States. Few parliamentary systems are likely to occupy such positions.

The second extreme type of government-party relationships is that of the dependent party: cases of this kind are located towards the bottom left-hand corner of the triangle close to the 'party-dependent' end of the 'direction of dependence' dimension. The supporting party is docile, as in the case of a single party system set up by a leader who wishes both to mobilise and to control the population, a situation which has occurred frequently in Black Africa, but the real prototype has been the Mexican PRI. The dependence of parties on the government in Britain had this character in the late 18th century; gradually, British parties acquired greater authority as parties, but the Conservative party has remained markedly dependent on its leader. Thus there may be 'fusion' of the leadership of the party and of the government in this case, but this fusion benefits the government rather than the party. Moreover, the policy of the party tends to be decided by the leader and a small entourage, the party playing only a limited part, and primarily when in opposition. The Conservative party is thus at some distance, but not very far, from the 'government-dominant' corner of the triangle. In the case of the British Labour party, party influence is larger, both with respect to the composition of the government and with respect to policy-making. Yet the governmental leadership of the Labour party has always insisted on its right to implement and even to shape party policy and the party rank-and-file is often reduced to manifesting its discontent without being able to force alternative policies on the leadership.

The other bottom corner of the triangle was traditionally occupied by Communist States, as the party leadership, rather than the governmental leadership, dictated policy and as the former appointed the latter (and indeed appointed, through the *nomenklatura* system, members of the public service well below the governmental level). This system was also a case of 'fusion', but of a 'fusion' exercised to the benefit of the party rather than to

the benefit of the government or, to use the Communist terminology, of the 'State apparatus'. Yet Communist States are not the only group of countries in which substantial dominance of the party over the government has existed for a long period: another group is constituted by many Continental European coalition governments of parliamentary systems in which both the selection of ministers and the determination of policies are markedly influenced by the parties supporting the government; in some of these countries, though not in all, patronage is also widespread. These systems are thus located fairly close to the right-hand corner of the triangle where Communist countries tended to be found before the late 1980s. Admittedly, there is some governmental autonomy and a degree of counterbalancing governmental influence: ministers are able to put some pressure on their party on policy matters; there is also occasionally some leeway with respect to governmental appointments, at least in some countries, as a result of the choice of persons coming from outside strict party ranks: but in general the party leadership exercises considerable influence.

Finally, some governments occupy positions close to the centre of the triangle, in that they are characterised by a degree of autonomy while retaining links with the parties supporting them. This situation typically described the case of Swedish social democratic governments as well as occasionally the governments of other Scandinavian countries. Such 'central' positions in the triangle are not occupied frequently, however. This is because they result from the existence of a subtle equilibrium between 'autonomy' and 'interdependence' which neither governments nor supporting parties are generally prepared to accept. Thus 'central' positions have tended to be transitional: they occur mainly as governments are losing some of the autonomy which they held previously, leaving some scope for manoeuvre only at the margin. The Fifth French Republic is a case in point. De Gaulle attempted to restore governmental autonomy in order to combat what he regarded as having been unacceptable party dominance over the government in the past. Quickly, however, autonomy was replaced by party dependence on the government, as a docile Gaullist party was set up to ensure support for the government in parliament: France thus came to occupy a position not unlike that of Britain under the Conservatives, indeed even closer than Britain to the 'government-dominant' corner of the triangle. Government-party relations subsequently moved somewhat from that corner: with the Socialist Party in power in the 1980s, government-supporting party relationships in France resembled those of Britain under Labour governments, that is to say be at some distance from the 'government-dominant' corner of the triangle, but also at a substantial distance from the mid-point of reciprocal influence and substantial autonomy which has tended to characterise Swedish social democratic governments.

The examples both of types and of moves which have been given here are naturally based primarily on general impressions rather than on detailed evidence: such evidence has yet to be collected. But these examples show that the differences are substantial and that it is possible to discover a number of positions around which many countries gravitate, even if concrete cases depart somewhat from these 'ideal' positions.

Government-party relationships are a central topic in democratic societies (as well indeed as in non-democratic polities) and in particular in parliamentary systems. This central topic can be analysed rigorously only if one goes beyond the simple remark that parties develop programmes which are expected to be implemented by the governments which these parties support. One must examine the relative autonomy and interdependence of



governments and supporting parties, however defined, with respect to policies, to appointments, and to patronage and one must look at these matters over time. One must then consider the complex interlocking factors which account for these relationships remembering that parties have often been set up not so much to put forward the views of the people, but to ensure that governments implement programmes which the people is only presumed to prefer. Moreover, even in the best cases of party influence, governments have been involved in many activities in which parties could not be or did not wish to be truly concerned. Naturally enough, the desire to see parties exercising real pressure on governments persists: it is a requirement if representative government is to be achieved. What needs also to be discovered are the ways in which and the specific matters on which party pressure on government is most often exercised. By giving a strong empirical base to the analysis, the normative reflection on party-government will be enhanced and one will be able to come to a better understanding of the mechanisms of parliamentary government and of the ways in which these mechanisms can be improved.