

What Happened to the British Party Model?

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Admired during much of this century, the British party model became especially attractive to American political scientists seeking responsible-party government in the early postwar years. After the mid-1960s, the model's appeal declined as did Britain's national status and the hopes for the democratic socialism often associated with the model. In the 1970s, the model itself seems to have worked in a way unlike that of prior decades. From this intellectual case history, a few broad inferences are drawn about the changing perspectives of political scientists.

My discussion of our profession's changing views of the British party model is not a way to develop generalizations of the kind that distinguished earlier presidential addresses on the nature and responsibility of political science. I find it difficult to offer general advice now that political scientists identify with increasingly specialized subjects and employ more disparate methods. Hence, I present an intellectual case history from which, at the end, I seek to draw only a few broad inferences about how transient circumstances and ideological concerns influence our political perceptions, and how the diminished appeal of a particular model may illustrate a wider skepticism about political systems.

The British party model is familiar from the works of several generations of scholars. Its essence is a sufficiently, but not an absolutely, cohesive parliamentary majority in support of executive office-holding leaders and so of policies accepted by those leaders as well as by the bulk of their partisan followers. Often associated with the model is a mass membership organized in constituency units and represented in national committees and conferences. Their policy-making role is disputed, in fact and in principle, but the model is that of "responsible-party government" whether the crucial parliamentary majority regards itself as mandated by its organized followers, its largely unorganized voters, or its own judgments. In one way or another, that party majority has been the centerpiece of modern British parliamentary government and of the "Westminster model" of strong cabinet leadership adapted and developed by certain Commonwealth nations. While not forgetting the vital linkage of a cohesive governing party with British-style parliamentary

institutions, I concentrate here on the party model because of its salience in American political science. Given an almost chronic dissatisfaction with the relative weakness of American parties, our descriptions of British parties have often suggested a special admiration. Moreover, the admiration has occasionally been strong enough to imply that American adaptations were possible even without the transplantation of the parliamentary system in which Britain's strong parties had thrived. The disjunction is observable despite the historical tendency of many American intellectuals, if not the larger American public, to admire British government more generally rather than just for its party model. That tendency among political scientists is excellently and comprehensively reviewed by Dennis Kavanagh (1974).

In addition to exploring the reasons for the British party model's attractiveness in the past, I shall try to explain its apparently diminished appeal during the 1970s although we have been more troubled than ever about the increasingly porous qualities of American parties. My concern here is mainly with changes in the model's appeal to liberal reformers prominent in American political science and in the search for strong party government. A different intellectual possibility would arise insofar as American conservatives were now to look to Prime Minister Thatcher's new parliamentary party majority for the doctrinal policy accomplishments to which her leadership is committed. But whether they or anyone else will be attracted to the model may also depend on the substantial changes in its operation during the 1970s. I describe these changes after discussing the use and disuse of the conventional model.

When and How the Model Was Used

Thanks to Ranney's analysis (1962), many of us realize that the British party model attracted the attention of American political scientists by the turn of the century. Both Wilson (1885) and Lowell (1902, 1908) appreciated that a parliamentary party majority supported an executive leadership's policies to an extent that an American congressional party majority did not. One of the first scholarly students of American parties, Henry Jones Ford (1898), cited the British model, apart from the direct influence of Woodrow Wilson. These founders of American political science, however, were not single-minded advocates of the transfer of British institutions to the United States, and Lowell explicitly recognized that British responsible-party government was incompatible with an American constitutional order designed to protect minority rights against a legislative majority (1889, pp. 78–96). Ours is not the first generation to understand the difficulty of transplanting institutions, and British institutions in particular (Lowell, 1910, p. 3).

However sophisticated the early American exposition of the British party model, it usually reflected admiration—explicitly in Wilson's presentation and implicitly in Lowell's despite its non-imitative character. But old British hands, sorry now to realize the diminished importance of our subject, should not exaggerate the place that British politics once occupied in the profession. To be sure, academic courses on Britain were fairly common before the study of comparative politics included many other nations, and Lowell's early text (1908) was followed by others, notably Ogg's standard treatment (1929). Judging, however, from old volumes of the *American Political Science Review*, one finds little evidence that any large number of scholars ever focused heavily on British affairs.¹ Although in the past American

political scientists would have been likely to know much more about Britain than about any other foreign nation, their dominant empirical interest then as later was in the American field.

Despite ordinarily limited attention from most American political scientists, the British political system provided our most convenient comparative benchmark. During the first half of this century, Britain's cultural prestige, imperial power, stable governmental institutions, and linguistic accessibility combined to make its political experience more familiar than that of other foreign nations. In addition, the programmatic and policy-oriented discussion of British politics appealed particularly to academics who esteemed such discussion and found it lacking in the United States. Insofar as British parties were based on ideas, even on ideologies, they had room for intellectual activity that seemed less welcome in Republican or Democratic politics. Admiration on this score dates back to Wilson's reading of Bagehot (1877) and it may be found among conservative as well as liberal writers. Certainly it was implicit and occasionally explicit in the American academic approach to the Labour party; a fairly early case in point is Dean McHenry's *Labour Party in Transition* (1940).

Not all earlier American academic writing about British parties or the rest of the British system was favorable. Being a familiar benchmark for comparison meant that the British model could also be cited invidiously. So it was in well-known works by Pendleton Herring (1940, pp. 129–30, 142) and by Don K. Price (1943). Each thought that Britain's disciplined party leadership had produced bad policy results during the 1930s, at the very time that American presidential leadership appeared to have been relatively successful. Probably the period about which Herring and Price wrote was exceptional in the first half of this century, but their penetrating rejection of the model tells us something about its presence in American political science. As Herring and Price realized, the British model had American cham-

¹By my count, the proportion of *APSR* articles on all British subjects (not just parties) was not above 8 percent even in the early decades of this century. Most of the articles that I counted as on British subjects dealt only or almost wholly with Britain, but I also included those that studied Britain along with one or two other nations. I did not include the articles, increasingly numerous in the last decade, that simply recorded British data along with data from many other nations. I tried to identify all of the articles that could reasonably be regarded as heavily British in their subject matter, but I ordinarily judged only from titles. I had more difficulty counting the total number

of articles on all subjects because several volumes contained reports, reviews of events, and research notes that were not always classifiable as articles in the usual sense. In dealing with these contributions, I tried to establish uniform rules of classification. Not everyone would use the same rules. According to my calculations, the number of all articles in a decade ranged from 167 to 466 and the number on British subjects from 7 to 26. In the 1970s, I counted only for the first nine years.

pions even in the wake of its failures in the 1930s.

American championship of the British model, it should be stressed, was more widespread not just when the model looked better than it did in the 1930s but also when there was greater dissatisfaction with our own political system and particularly with the role of parties in that system. Fading during the early years of the presidencies of Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt, as partisan congressional majorities enacted innovative policies, dissatisfaction rose in the years between World War II and the early 1960s. No consistently effective party majority functioned to enact the kind of domestic program that liberal intellectuals wanted, and political frustration tended to focus around the inadequacy of party when (in 1949–53, for example) Democrats nominally held both houses of Congress and the presidency. We remember this period in political science for the flourishing of responsible-party advocacy.

If any time were opportune to cite the British model, as it had been cited 50 years before, it was in the first 15 or 20 years after World War II. The American desire for a democratic alternative was strong, and, particularly from 1945 to 1951, the British model was widely thought to have worked effectively to achieve moderate socialist policies. Even in the decade or so after 1951, when Labour left office, British responsible-party government retained its aura of success partly because the Conservative majorities accepted most of Labour's legislation and partly because of Labour's expected, though delayed, return to power. Furthermore, the British political system generally was again held in great esteem. It had survived World War II, as had no other major Western European regime, and its interwar failures looked less important than its maintenance through such bad times and its rapid peaceful adaptation to social-democratic purposes after the 1945 general election. Newly self-governing nations, especially those in the Commonwealth, sought to adapt British political institutions, not without encouragement from Britons confident of the virtues of their own system.

A few of us can remember that glad confident postwar British morning in which democratic hopes rested heavily on parliamentary government and its responsible-party mainspring. The interest of American political scientists in Britain was as always much less than pervasive, but there was an increased awareness of British political institutions. Books by British scholars like Ivor Jennings (1936, 1939) provided full accounts of how these institutions

worked, often stressing the importance of parties. Others like Herman Finer (1949) presented British parties and other political institutions in a favorable comparative context. Interest was even reflected in a small increase in the number of articles on British subjects that the *American Political Science Review* published in the early 1950s. The British party model became a standard reference point in the comparative politics courses that developed in American universities after World War II, and new textbooks treated it as working successfully in contrast to the experience with multiparty arrangements in most continental European nations. In the teaching of American government, the capacity of a British party to enact a program was contrasted to the description of brokered politics in the American system.

At the same time, most political scientists understood the difficulties that would impede American adoption of the British party model, or even of significant portions of it. However much the American responsible-party school now admired the model, it could not readily suggest explicit emulation without also recommending apparently utopian constitutional changes that it sought ordinarily and realistically to avoid. I have in mind the famous advocates of responsible American parties, E. E. Schattschneider and the APSA's own Committee on Political Parties. Although a member of the committee, Schattschneider most clearly and fully stated his case in *Party Government* (1942), a widely used book in the immediate postwar years, and *The Struggle for Party Government* (1948), an influential series of short essays. After searching in these two works for references to British experience, I am struck with their approving character, even in 1942 before the advent of the postwar Labour government, but also with their small number, brevity, and limited applicability to the author's main argument. Schattschneider approvingly contrasted British cabinet government, under the effective control of the leaders of a majority parliamentary party, with the American situation in which the Constitution makes such a government impossible (1942, pp. 123–27). Because he proposed no constitutional change, the contrast served only to help explain the nature of the American problem of securing responsible parties. Elsewhere, Schattschneider only implied possible American emulation of British practices by emphasizing the virtues of a less locally oriented parliamentary candidate-selection process (1942, pp. 99–100), the more limited role of pressure groups in the House of Commons (1942, p. 107), and the British acceptance of *party*

politics as respectable activity (1948, p. 8).

The APSA's controversial committee report, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System" (1950), said even less about the British model. The cabinet system was mentioned only to be quickly put aside (p. 35), and there was a brief though admiring description of the substantial permanent central staffing of British parties (p. 49). Limited though these references surely were, we have the written evidence of one who served on the committee, E. M. Kirkpatrick, that "the British model was significant for a number of its members" (1971, p. 974). Furthermore, Kirkpatrick devoted two pages of his devastatingly critical analysis of the report to the proposition that the committee had seriously misunderstood the actual operation of British parties and had, consequently, advocated changes in accord with a partly fictitious model (pp. 974-76). I might temper that criticism, but I can hardly challenge Kirkpatrick's recollection of the significance that the British model had for committee members. It should be emphasized, however, that even Kirkpatrick's account did not assert that the committee thought that the United States could or should adopt the full British party model. At most, the committee wanted American parties to follow certain British practices despite the constraints of the American constitutional setting.

In stressing that the much-abused APSA committee report was innocent of wholesale imitation of the British model, I am trying to sustain my view that American political scientists who used the model did not often let their admiration, when it existed, lead them to think that we could or should fully copy it in the United States. Not only were most Americanists among us wary of wholesale imitation of the British model but so also were most comparativists. Samuel Beer, the leading postwar American scholar of British parties, is illustrative. Admiring generally though not wholly the British party model that he explicated so well, and often seeming to want more effective and coherent American policy making, Beer nevertheless remained dubious about the importation of British-inspired reforms (1962, pp. 55, 76). Writing when British governmental prestige was still high, he did no more than favorably contrast "the concentration of power in the British system" with the American system's "dispersion of power" that creates tendencies toward "incoherence and immobilism" (p. 78).

Understanding the Model

Particularly during the postwar years, several specialized American and British scholars sought to rectify suspected misconceptions and misinformation about how parties worked in Britain. Rectification of this kind became a thriving, though small, academic industry, and I confess to a part in it. Little of the criticism, however, sought to refute the view that party government existed in Britain in a form or to an extent unknown in the United States. The essence of the model, as we had known it since Wilson and Lowell, remained securely in place. Most critics argued that American party reformers in the postwar years had tended, on the basis of limited acquaintance, to exaggerate the admittedly high degree of parliamentary party cohesion, and, more significantly, to attribute it to greater ideological commitment, stronger central party control, fuller mass-membership participation in policy making, and more clear-cut electoral mandates than actually existed in Britain. Although in retrospect I am inclined to stress the limitations of the criticism, much of it was certainly substantial and useful. One of the earliest and best corrective pieces was by David Butler; he contended that "British parties are in fact much less differentiated and much less democratic than is often supposed, and that it is a good thing that this should be so" (1955, p. 47). He thought that their differences, ideologically and programmatically, were not nearly so great in the postwar years as they had seemed to be in the 1930s. Butler also believed that parliamentary leaders, not rank-and-file party members, were predominant as policy makers even in the Labour party. Here Butler's theme resembled that of McKenzie's major party organizational study (1955). Their stress on the leadership's policy-making power, it should be noted, would not have troubled all American responsible-party advocates; Schattschneider, for example, did not rest his case on intra-party democracy.

In any event, there is a respectable argument to be made for important occasional influence flowing from organized British party members (Minkin, 1978). It cannot be so confidently dismissed as wrong even by those of us who have accepted most of McKenzie's analysis and preferences. From time to time, a party conference representing a dues-paying membership, or an executive committee acting in its behalf, affected the policies of an election manifesto. So it seemed in one important particular of Labour's 1945 election program (Beer, 1965, pp. 174-78), notable also for the fact that so much of the program was subsequently en-

acted. No doubt, the salience of this experience in the immediate postwar years led too readily to generalizations not just about intra-party democracy but also about clear-cut electoral mandates and government policy accomplishments that could not be supported by experience in other periods. Such mistaken generalizations, however, strike me as exaggerations, often temporary, of certain characteristics of the model, rather than as basic misunderstandings.

American party reformers might have had reasons of their own for highlighting whatever role the mass membership played in party affairs. Without the benefit of a parliamentary system that could itself produce the legislative cohesion necessary for an effective programmatic governing party, it was natural to look to whatever else seemed to encourage party loyalty among British MPs. The ideological and programmatic commitments of their organized followers were plausible encouragements especially insofar as these commitments were enforced in one way or another—that is, if MPs were threatened with loss of place for significantly deviating from the wishes of their party's dues-paying members. On this score, one did not have to believe that the organized external membership made or even heavily influenced policies imposed on the parliamentary party. No more had to be assumed than that the organized membership shared the commitments (often more zealously) of its parliamentary leaders and was willing to select as candidates those who would act in accord with those commitments. With rare exceptions, British party members fulfilled those conditions, and, without the hurdle of a direct primary, their bestowal of the party label on candidates remained definitive. If at first in the postwar years the candidate-selection process was incorrectly perceived as highly centralized, the picture of committed party persons in control of the process was not critically changed by learning that constituency-party activists were effectively the selectors (Ranney, 1965). These activists, while choosing candidates in constituency organizations, remained national rather than local in their policy orientations. American responsible-party advocates could still envy the programmatic enforcement that the system thus allowed, and they might even hope in the United States to mobilize similar programmatic followers capable of selecting loyal candidates and of helping them to win direct primaries.

The postwar American party reformers ordinarily realized that those who cared about national party policies would have to control or exert great influence in the congressional nom-

inating process if they were to have a responsible-party system. Moreover, in the 1950s new ideological or programmatic American party organizations, called amateur, non-patronage, and voluntary, developed in several states mainly for this purpose. The fact that they could not regularly fulfill the purpose, in the British manner, tells us what even many responsible-party advocates have always known: the American political structure imposes formidable obstacles to the development of programmatically cohesive parties on a national scale. The experience does not tell us that there was an ill-informed effort to imitate British practices. Not only were the new American programmatic activists probably unaware of any British model, but also their intellectual supporters among political scientists, while more likely to have the model in mind, may not have misunderstood it in thinking that Americans should try to emulate its organizational and candidate-selection features. At most, it seems to me, they might have overestimated the degree to which extra-parliamentary organizations, in contrast to the pressures of the parliamentary system itself, were responsible for British party cohesion.

Turning from party reformers, what can be said about the way in which comparative politics specialists understood the British party model during the first two postwar decades? We can fairly assume that they, whether American or British, would have been a principal source of knowledge for the rest of the profession. Their emphases vary, of course, and it is risky to generalize. Textbook chapters, I believe, properly stressed the parliamentary discipline that characterized the two major parties in the 1950s and early 1960s although the qualifications might not always have been as fully spelled out as we should now prefer. Among specialized works, Beer's influential *British Politics in the Collectivist Age* (1965) devoted more attention to the ideological character of both major parties than did several other close observers, but Beer's description of British party government was representative in depicting its relative strength and cohesion, and carefully tempered by an appreciation of the importance of interest groups in the system. To be sure, this appreciation was mainly reserved for the way in which interest groups were accommodated within or through the major parties and the ministries, in contrast to the more direct legislative influence of interest groups in the United States.

Here, in relation to interest groups, we should note a more basic problem concerning the American understanding of the British

party. Customarily it was perceived as majoritarian in the sense of being much more capable than an American party of enacting a program or set of policies in behalf of a majority of citizens. Beer's description was not at odds with this perception; it filled it out, sensibly, by showing how a British party aggregated diverse interests compatibly with the maintenance of its legislative cohesion. Did that aggregating function make it possible for American pluralists to admire the British party model? I raise the query because without an affirmative answer to it we might conclude that American pluralists should have rejected the British party model. No doubt, many did reject it even during its heyday. Admiration would always have been easier for an unabashed majoritarian like Schattschneider.

Declining Attractiveness

The decline in the model's attractiveness is, I believe, readily apparent. Along with Britain's political institutions generally, its parties have suffered new blows from American and British critics during the last 10 or 15 years. Effective and coherent policy making is no longer perceived as the predominant result of the British system. Party government is blamed for many of Britain's new failures. Kavanagh captured the spirit as well as the substance of the recent American criticism in his broader review article (1974, pp. 263-65). He cited several important works rejecting the once-supposed superiority of the British model. Among them is Kenneth Waltz's major assault (1967) on Britain's political leadership in foreign policy since 1945. While critical of the whole British political system, Waltz regarded the prime minister's concern for party unity as a principal cause for neglect of a broader public interest (p. 62). Moreover, he contrasted this feature of the British party model unfavorably with the American arrangement that allows for a less party-oriented foreign policy leadership (p. 307). If few other political scientists went so far as Waltz, there were widespread doubts about the British system after the mid-1960s. As Kavanagh notes, they appear in Beer's epilogue chapter (1969), written for the paperback edition of his 1965 book, and the doubts refer particularly to the efficacy of British party government.

Certain American criticism probably originated in this country, perhaps as reaction against a perceived anglophile tradition, but American political scientists were hardly unaware that British writers had begun to express a new dissatisfaction with their own political

institutions and with parties in particular. Bernard Crick's proposals for parliamentary reform (1964), strengthening MPs and the Commons as a whole in relation to the party-based executive leadership, were well known in this country, and so, a little later, were the critical opinions of John Mackintosh on the way in which party cohesiveness actually functioned (1976). Indeed, it would have been hard for any American student of British politics in the 1970s to escape what had become a prevailing current of adverse commentary on party government by British political scientists and related intellectual publicists. The commentary could be said to have culminated in *The Economist's* well-publicized five-page editorial leader marking Guy Fawkes Day (1977); the leader recommended the figurative blowing up of the system of government that allows "two alternating party political tyrannies" (p. 11). *The Economist* would free Britain from these tyrannies—that is, from the likelihood of responsible party government—by a form of proportional representation that would preclude a majority party without a majority of popular votes, by a constitutional bill of rights limiting the scope of governmental action, and by a parliament whose members, committees, and resources would more nearly resemble those of the U.S. Congress than those of the much less powerful House of Commons. To be sure, these recommendations were not out of line with *The Economist's* nineteenth-century liberal tradition, but the ground had now been well prepared by numerous academic critics of the system.

We should not, therefore, expect many favorable references to British party performance in the most recent proposals for the reform of American political parties. Certain proposals did not even use the old "responsible party" theme that might have drawn, implicitly or explicitly, on the British model. Saloma and Sontag, for example, avoided the language of the responsible-party school. They sought to distinguish themselves from its principal advocates (1972, p. 10) although they did recommend several features of responsible parties—for example, more policy-coherent congressional parties and more issue-oriented citizen participation in electoral party organizations. On the other hand, the actual post-1968 Democratic party reforms moved, in vital respects, away from responsible-party goals. Whatever its model, the McGovern-Fraser Commission, seeking more open and wider participation in party affairs, helped to demolish what there was of regularized control of nomination processes. The shift was in the progressive anti-organiza-

tional direction. If the Democratic reformers wanted to build a new, stronger, and more ideological organization after destroying old and inappropriate structures, their intentions were seldom explicit enough to cite a responsible-party model, British or any other (Crotty, 1977).

Yet many American students of parties continued to prefer responsible parties in the 1970s although some avoided, as did Saloma and Sontag, an identification with the responsible-party school. Others, like W. D. Burnham (1970), were less optimistic about the possibilities than were political scientists of an earlier generation. Now and then the responsible-party school itself received a favorable reexamination. Pomper (1971) argued that the APSA committee of 1950 had often been correct in its projections of the consequences of continuing to function without responsible parties, and that certain conditions required for such parties were more fully met in the 1970s than in the 1950s. While thus being relatively optimistic, Pomper did not cite the British model. Of course, that is not evidence that he rejected it—any more than a similar absence of the British model from J. M. Burns' earlier popular book advocating responsible American parties (1963) indicates such rejection. The model, along with Britain generally, may just command less attention when the old favorable image dims. So it is possible to account for the absence of British experience in Broder's well-known book (1972) and in his very recent writing (1979). In urging that we develop much stronger parties, Broder (1972, pp. 182, 244–46) drew heavily from the APSA's report of 1950, as well as from other political scientists, but he did not specify anything about the British model that might have been in the minds of certain earlier writers. Insofar as Broder had a working model, it was of a responsible-party government that he believed once existed in more substantial degree in the United States (1972, p. 170).

Lest we conclude that all American reformers abandoned discussion of the British party model, we should note Charles Hardin's case for a new American constitution (1974) redesigned on principles so close to those of British parliamentary government that it would produce the kind of strong party that has existed in modern Britain. Not only did Hardin insist with good reason, if with unrealistic hope, that parliamentary-type institutions must be adopted in order to produce British-type parties; but also, in so arguing, he responded to a large portion of the recently adverse criticism of the performance of British party government

(pp. 131–41). Significantly, Hardin liked the British party model not merely because party government promises coherent policy making but especially because such policy making is collective rather than individual in the manner of the American presidency. Writing when the presidency had been darkened by Nixon and by failures in Vietnam, Hardin wanted a chief executive who would, like a British prime minister, be a party leader subject to control by his or her legislative followers. Executive authority could thus be strong and yet effectively limited (pp. 2–5).

Other Americans, less interested than Hardin in strengthening parties, similarly discovered in British experience a means for restraining American executive authority in the 1970s. It is hard to say that they found the British party model attractive as had the older responsible-party school or even Hardin. For example, Groth (1970) concentrated on the restraints imposed on British prime ministers because they shared decision-making power with the cabinet and had to answer for it in the Commons. Groth's admiration is primarily for the traditional parliamentary institutions that limited the executive and not for the strong party support that others had supposed those institutions to have helped produce. Later post-Watergate critics occasionally looked enviously to Britain's conventional vote of no-confidence as a way to limit chief executives. These ideas, critically reviewed by Livingston (1976), are tangential to my analysis but interesting because they indicate that in the early and mid-1970s Americans could be attracted to British practices that are distinguishable from those usually associated with the party model itself.

The period for that kind of attraction may already have ended when the Watergate scandal receded and Americans began again to search for a strong president who would lead Congress rather than being limited by it. Probably, too, not very many political scientists even in the early and mid-1970s looked to the restraining features of British institutions. Instead, the relatively strong and cohesive parliamentary parties remained familiar benchmarks for elucidating, by comparison, the increasingly great independence-from-party of American congressional representatives. Thus Mayhew explained the American situation by a highly sophisticated reference to the British (1974, pp. 19–27). Although at least implicitly critical of a good deal of American congressional behavior, Mayhew stressed the way in which such behavior is a consequence of a system basically different from Britain's. So neutrally objective

an account of the British party model, without the old admiration and certainly without recommendations for emulation, strikes me as typical, despite the exceptions cited, of those American political scientists who used the British comparison at all in the 1970s and even the late 1960s. I admit, however, that I do not find numerous contemporary discussions of British experience in the kind of American context that Mayhew provides.

My impression is that American academic interest in many aspects of British politics declined in the last two decades, or, more precisely, that it declined relative to other interests. There is no disconfirmation of that impression in the rough counting that I described in my earlier footnote; rather, the proportion of *APSR* articles on all British subjects dropped to two percent in the 1960s and 1970s from six percent in the 1950s and four to eight percent in preceding decades. Counting only *APSR* articles may underestimate the recent British interest on the part of American political scientists because they could now be contributing works on Britain to several new specialized journals. Hence the general significance of the reported small decline is uncertain. For the professional journal serving the largest political science readership, strictly scholarly developments, like the growth of research on many other nations and on new topics unconnected with any particular nations, could help explain any lessened relative interest in British subjects. But there is also the plain fact that Britain as a nation has become much less powerful and important in the world during the last few decades. We have less cause to look at Britain's foreign policy making, either for its successes or failures, when it no longer plays a major role in international affairs. Moreover, Britain's economy has grown less rapidly than the economies of most continental nations and has now fallen below several of them in an absolute sense. Whether or not national failures are blamed on party government or any other political institution, Britain is a struggling medium-sized industrial country much less likely than in its great-power days to provide models for us.

A probable ideological cause for turning away from the British party model also appears in the late 1960s and the 1970s. These were years of disappointment for democratic socialism. Unlike the period immediately following 1945, the American Left—socialist, crypto-socialist, or just welfare-statist—could now see little in Britain by way of major change or promise of major change. Thus the British party model lacked much of the allure of preceding

decades. I do not suggest that conservative Americans have never been attracted to the party model, as they were to other British political institutions, but I believe that the particular model had appealed especially to left-of-center reformers who sought a means effectively to mobilize a majority to support domestic economic and social legislation. I tried to make the point in discussing the use of the model in the late 1940s and the 1950s, and I believe that it can also be made about Woodrow Wilson's admiration for British party government as he himself became a reformer. Like Wilson, relatively few Americans who, after 1945, looked hopefully to British Labour were socialists, even in the loose British sense. But in the postwar years they saw Labour using its parliamentary party majority to enact large-scale economic and social changes within a stable democratic society. Without that use, the British party model lost a substantial portion of its old American constituency.

The loss—that is, the diminished ideological appeal—is explicable from several standpoints. British socialism and the Labour party were themselves often associated with Britain's decline and failures—being largely blamed for *The Future That Doesn't Work* (Tyrrell, 1977). So perhaps fewer observers now favored British socialism and the political means for its accomplishment. Thus the American Left might itself have diminished or have become a still less explicitly socialist Left. But even among those seeking socialist solutions—including many seeking these solutions for the first time—the British parliamentary means for achieving socialism had come to look even more pragmatic and so less “socialist” than earlier; furthermore, Labour party leadership had become more prominently middle-class. Harold Wilson's 13 years (1963–1976) as Labour leader, eight of them as prime minister, were uninspiring for socialists.

Likelier than earlier, socialists could find credible, or at least plausible, the far-Left's persistent rejection of the established parliamentary means for the political advancement of working-class objectives. Leninists were not alone among socialists rejecting British Labour's credentials and methods. More popular among intellectuals in Britain and the United States during the late 1960s and the 1970s were those who used Marxist arguments against parliamentary socialism without adopting the explicitly Leninist alternative of revolutionary action to create a dictatorship of the proletariat. Well known among these critics of the Labour party is Ralph Miliband. His books (1961, 1973, and 1977), widely circulated in both Britain and the

United States, argued that the failures of Labour governments to be more socialist lay in the party's too-exclusive reliance on conventional parliamentary means. Miliband did not want to abandon those means, or the political liberties associated with them, but he did want the mobilization of working-class participants in a network of organizations supplementing state power (1977, pp. 188–89). Still more sharply, another British leftist critic, David Coates, following Miliband's earlier writing, contended that Labour's faith in the reforming potential of a parliamentary majority is misplaced and that now, as in the past, Labour's failures illustrate "the impossibility of the Parliamentary road to socialism" (1975, pp. 144, 229).

No doubt, few American political scientists would have turned away from the British party model because of Marxist-influenced criticism of Labour's use of that model. Nevertheless, I cite these critics to indicate the breadth of disillusionment with the conventional hopes for the model. The point can also be illustrated by turning to a more moderate critic of Labour's inability to achieve working-class objectives. Andrew Martin, an American political scientist asking only whether democratic control—defined as organized labor's control—of capitalist economies is possible (1975), argued that Swedish Social Democrats may have succeeded in a way that British Labour had not. His case, ingeniously made, rests on the possibly crucial usefulness of continuous long-term power for the party representing organized labor. Thus the Swedish Social Democrats, dominating governments for over four decades, could accomplish objectives impossible for British Labour because of its enforced alternation in office. In other words, the very election system that provided the Labour party with a parliamentary majority also deprived it of a sufficiently long-run opportunity to carry out its program successfully. Britain's kind of two-party competition, resting on single-member plurality elections and ordinarily perceived as advantageous for enactment of a socialist program, is in Martin's view less useful than Sweden's multi-partyism, associated with proportional representation, which allowed Social Democrats to control governmental policies as the largest single party, although not often with a majority of parliamentary seats. Hence, in a special way Martin saw defects in the British party model.

Regardless of the election system and the number of effectively competing parties, it may have become harder for a labor or social democratic party in any highly developed society to mobilize an electoral majority for strictly

working-class objectives. The industrial working class no longer appears large enough in any homogeneous sense to provide such a majority. As Inglehart declared, "The Left *must* go beyond a working-class base if it hopes to win elections" (1977, p. 215). As white-collar workers are beginning to outnumber blue-collar workers, he believed that a party of the Left would have little chance if it depended on class-based voting. Its hopes, he argued, lie in attracting votes from "a relatively large Post-Materialist section of the middle class" (p. 215). Such hopes may well be realizable in Britain or elsewhere, but it is not clear that their realization in an electoral sense would mean realization in the old working-class socialist sense. A majority now would be more diverse in its composition and interests, and perhaps more transient. The party model thus becomes more pluralist in character than it was for those socialists who conceived of a majority party as representative of the working-class majority of the population.

It is true that most advocates of stronger American parties never adopted the class-based majoritarianism found in the European socialist tradition. They tended to be majoritarian only in the sense of believing that a party could mobilize a set of interests constituting an effective majority supporting a given program. Insofar as British Labour might have seemed a class-based party in the European tradition, it could not so readily serve as a model in the United States. But, as I have suggested, the Labour party had impressed American reformers, correctly, I believe, as a less thoroughly majoritarian, even a quasi-pluralist, means for achieving socialist or certain non-socialist purposes.

The point that remains is that American reformers as well as socialists recently became impressed with perceived failures rather than successes of the British Labour party. Hence, an important mid-century reason for the American Left to admire the British party model disappeared, at least temporarily. It is too soon to know whether any comparable admiration will develop on the American right if the British Conservative party's parliamentary majority of 1979 should successfully enact its anti-socialist policies.

Changes in the Model

For those interested in broadly programmatic policies, left or right, the British party model's attractiveness always rested on its actual operations; British responsible-party gov-

ernment was a working model rather than an abstraction. So it still was also for many of its new critics in the late 1960s and the 1970s; for example, the *Economist's* attack of 1977, previously cited, assumed that party government remained powerful. On the other hand, political scientists, in Britain and the United States, began in the 1970s to observe changes in the characteristics of British parties. In their eyes, the system could no longer be counted on to produce a cohesive party majority as it had during the previous three or four decades of Conservative-Labour competition. Some observers also challenged the earlier description for overlooking or down-playing past deviations from cohesive party government. The emphasis, however, was on changes evident in the 1970s even if they were treated as implicit in earlier experiences (Rasmussen, 1979).

Important changes were found in electoral behavior, parliamentary parties, and extra-parliamentary organizations. All indicated a weakening of the capacity of the two major parties, Conservative and Labour, to dominate British politics and government. Least crucial, in my opinion, was the decline in the direct individual dues-paying membership of the extra-parliamentary party organizations. Having by the 1960s already dropped from peaks achieved in the early 1950s, both the Conservative and Labour parties continued the generally downward trends in such memberships. The Conservative total, however, apparently remained over one million, after having been over two million, and Labour's, while roughly half of what it had been and down to about 300,000, was augmented by over six million indirectly affiliated trade-union memberships (*Economist*, 1975, p. 22). It is not clear that diminished numbers of direct dues-paying members lessened the always-disputed policy-making role of the external organizations. Insofar as the extra-parliamentary party organization might reinforce the parliamentary party loyalty achieved and achievable as a result of other causes, a smaller membership could be just as effective. Where, however, a diminished organization would be less effective is in campaigning. Systematic volunteer canvassing, long so conspicuous an activity of British constituency parties (Turner, 1978), requires a substantial regularized membership. Its decline may thus make it harder for the major parties to mobilize voters although the membership decline itself may also have been caused by a weakening of the parties for other reasons or by the deliberate substitution of mass-media campaigning for individual canvassing. I do not, therefore, treat party membership declines as generally

insignificant when I contend that they have not themselves basically altered the British party model.

Much more fundamental was the inability of either major party to win and hold a secure majority of parliamentary seats during about half of the 1970s. From February to October 1974, when Labour governed after winning less than half the seats in the February general election, and also during the next four and one-half years, when Labour had either the barest of majorities or, in the last three years, had none at all except with the help of minor parties, there could simply be no strong party government in the conventional sense. The duration of minority-party government in the 1970s was especially striking. During the preceding decades of two-party dominance, not to mention the 1920s, governments had rested on slim and insecure majorities. They were, however, short-lived and more readily viewed as transitional than the Labour governments of 1974–1979. Admittedly, those governments too may later be regarded as transitional if several years of party majorities now follow the May 1979 election.

Nevertheless, the experience of the 1970s suggests continued departures from the postwar two-party order. It is true that Britain's use of the simple-plurality, single-member election system still helps mightily to produce a majority parliamentary party on a minority of national popular votes for its candidates. But as is shown by long Canadian experience, even more than by Britain's in the 1970s, the election system's magnification, or distortion, of a major party's popular vote has not always been sufficient to provide a secure majority, if any majority at all. In Britain, it was insufficient in the 1974 elections when neither major party received 40 percent of the total popular vote, and it was just sufficient for a safe parliamentary majority in 1979 when the Conservatives received almost 44 percent of the vote. The popular democratic credentials of that parliamentary majority, it should be noted, are suspect in greater degree than they were for earlier party majorities that rested on about 48 percent of the voters (or on an actual voting majority, last achieved in 1935). But in the 1970s it was hard for a major party to come close to winning half of the popular vote. Third-party Liberals, various regional parties, and minor parties together polled between a tenth and a quarter of the votes in the four general elections of the decade, including almost a fifth in the 1979 election that produced the substantial Conservative majority in the House of Commons. The persistence of Liberal

electoral strength, still at almost 14 percent in 1979 after its postwar highs of 18 and 19 percent in 1974, is notable. So too, as evidence of the limitations of the major parties, is the increased volatility of support for Labour and the Conservatives (Crewe, 1976). The erosion of electoral commitment to the major parties became most apparent in the 1970s although it may well have begun a decade or more earlier. Voters identified less strongly and less constantly with Conservatives and Labour without always substituting any more durable third-party commitments. Perhaps British two-partyism suffered in the 1970s because the class basis for the earlier mobilization of Conservative and Labour voters had diminished (Butler and Stokes, 1974, p. 208). Whatever the reason, achieving the kind of electoral support requisite for majority-party government was now much more uncertain than it had been in the postwar years.

Still more disruptive of the party model in the 1970s was a decreasing cohesiveness in each parliamentary party even when it had a majority. The way in which the European Economic Community (EEC) issue cut across party lines was only the most highly visible of these signs. The critical parliamentary decisions on EEC in both 1971 and 1975 rested on cross-party majorities, and in 1975 the governing Labour party split sharply and widely when it held a national referendum on Britain's continued membership (King, 1977). Even if the EEC issue had been alone in producing intra-party parliamentary divisions, it could not readily be treated as of little general relevance. Deciding whether the nation should belong to the EEC was the most significant British policy making of the decade and perhaps of the last 40 years. Probably, however, less conspicuous divisions than those on the EEC issue are more persuasive with respect to decreased parliamentary-party cohesion.

The increasing frequency of intra-party dissent in parliamentary voting has been carefully tabulated and analyzed by Philip Norton of the University of Hull. His recording of all cross-voting from 1945 to 1974, shows a sharp rise in both the number and proportion of divisions involving dissenting votes from the earlier parliaments (especially those of the 1950s) to the parliament of 1970–74. Norton finds the Conservative government of 1970–74 to have been actually defeated on five occasions as a result of dissenting votes, including abstentions, and to have suffered on one occasion from the adverse votes of two-thirds of its party's MPs on a whipped division (Norton, 1975, pp. 609–10). These examples are especially telling because

the Conservative government of 1970–74 did have a parliamentary majority at just the level of modesty once thought most likely to ensure solidarity and so its policy-making effectiveness. The rising intra-party dissension of the early 1970s makes it unlikely that the better-known dissension during the Labour governments of 1974–79 could be characteristic only of circumstances in which there was either the barest party majority or none. Instead, Norton's later analyses (1976, 1977, and 1978) display the post-1974 intra-party voting dissension as a continuation of tendencies previously established. Between 1974 and 1979, several Labour MPs helped, crucially on occasion, to defeat their government's parliamentary policies on expenditures, taxes, Scottish devolution, and wage restraint. They rallied back to the flag only on votes of confidence, thus helping to keep their party leaders in office.

Of course, from 1976 to 1979, their party's lack of a parliamentary majority meant that Labour MPs needed the support or least the abstention of certain minor-party MPs in order to win confidence votes. Accordingly, when almost all the minor-party MPs voted with the Conservative opposition on the April 1979 confidence motion, Labour's solidarity, though complete, was not enough to keep the government in office. Losing a vote of confidence, as Callaghan's government thus did in 1979, was not at odds with any previously expected operation of the system. Although there had been no other such loss for over 50 years, it was well understood that a minority governing party might always be defeated by a combination of opposing parties. During the three preceding years, however, the system had worked differently from the way in which many of us had told our students that it had worked in the postwar decades. Prime Minister Callaghan remained in office, 1976–79, despite unreversed parliamentary defeats of several of his government's important policies. Moreover, they were defeats that he might well have suffered, as had Heath in 1970–74, even if his party had held a majority rather than almost a majority of seats.

It is clear that in the 1970s both Conservative and Labour MPs voted more independently, and more consequently so, than their predecessors of the 1950s.² The change need not have been overwhelming in order to be

²In another article in this issue, John E. Schwarz carefully describes and analyzes the significance of the more frequently independent voting behavior of MPs. His article's appearance indicates that American scho-

important. We can still appreciate that MPs, while never as regularly docile as the most extreme picture of party discipline might have implied, remained in the 1970s much more regularly loyal to their parties than American congressional representatives ever have been. We can also appreciate that the decline in parliamentary party cohesion might, like that of the electoral capacity of the major parties, be reversible. But, at least for the 1970s, we must say that the British party model itself substantially changed. A cohesive party as well as a majority party became less certain.

Concluding Inferences

The *first* of the broad inferences to be drawn from my review of the place of the British party model in political science comes most directly from the last section. It concerns the time-bound nature of our studies, about which I also wrote when reviewing works on American presidential nominations (Epstein, 1978). In that fascinating area, generalizations based on the politics of 1940–1968 were evidently shaken by experiences in 1972 and 1976. Here and elsewhere, political scientists must now be aware of changes in patterns discerned only a decade or so earlier. The awareness is notably acute in recent scholarship in the highly developed study of voting behavior (Nie et al., 1976; Butler and Stokes, 1974). Yet we like to write in the present tense, so describing behavior and the operation of political institutions in terms that allow readers to think that there is and will be a continuity in what we have found to exist over the past decade or two. It is one of the ways in which we distinguish ourselves from most historians. When we desert the present tense, we often still imply that recently observed developments will remain in effect. I may have come close to doing that in describing the weakened grip of British parties during the 1970s, and I am certain that many of us treated the dominant and cohesive Conservative and Labour parties of the first postwar years as though they would remain so into an indefinite future. Now their great power in the years soon after World War II looks to have been something of a period piece, expressing a simpler, more complete two-party division between classes and ideologies than had prevailed during earlier decades, or that would prevail in the 1970s. At least

from the standpoint of 1979, the capacity of the British system to mobilize almost all political interests into two major parties, each cohesive in its purposes, seems a transient phenomenon rather than a durable culmination of long-run developments. Although Americans still have good reason to view each major British party as relatively cohesive and capable of responsible government, now as in the rest of the last century, we must qualify the sharper picture that we had a little earlier.

My *second* inference relates to the perspective of time in a different sense. Even if we have accurately described the British party model in reasonably qualified form, as I believe that political scientists have usually done, its attractiveness rose and fell especially with the policy successes and failures that the American Left identified with it. As I have observed, it was on the left, a moderate Left to be sure, that the model usually had its American champions. While embraced by British Tories as well as by British socialists (but not always by British liberals), the majoritarian feature of responsible-party government might have had less appeal for American conservatives. So far at least, it is mainly the ideological perspective of the Left that helps to explain the rise and decline of the British party model's attractiveness in the United States.

Third, the diminished attractiveness of the British party model parallels experience with other once-popular working political models. I am thinking especially but not only of socialist models like those provided by the USSR and other nations governed by Communist parties. It seems to me that Western Marxists now seldom regard any of these nations as suitable models for the United States or other advanced industrial societies. The socialist goals that they retain do not appear to be based on working models elsewhere, as they often were, for instance, in the 1930s. We do not live in a time when the desire for a better political world characteristically finds its fulfillment in a happy experience elsewhere. What hopes we still have must evidently depend on using our own political institutions rather than trying to reshape them according to an operating model in another country. Political scientists may have played a part in bringing about this change, specifically in the case of the British party model by explaining how it actually works, but I should think that their part has been modest relative to other changing perspectives that have made the British experience less compelling.

These new perspectives, it should be added, need not mark the end of our discipline's long-standing treatment of British party govern-

larly interest in Britain has by no means vanished even if it might have diminished.

ment as a principal comparative benchmark for the exposition of the American political system. The model could thus remain useful analytically even without its old appeal as a superior political instrument.

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