

## **POLITICAL PARTIES: DECLINE AND REVIVAL**

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Political parties and a competitive party system are considered to be an essential part of liberal democratic states. Yet in Japan and the United States and some other countries today they are under attack and there is disillusionment with them and the political system. This paper suggests that there are four main features of contemporary political parties which are central to their failure or success; ideals, leadership, organisation and orientation. Parties are more than formal organisations and while they are dependent upon ideals and leaders these must not only appeal to the intellect but also to the emotions. To be successful parties must have the right orientation. The paper discusses these features in the resurgence of the British Labour Party, and in the Social Democratic Party of Japan.

### **Introduction**

Parties trace their origins back to the cliques and groups of the 18th century legislative assemblies but modern parties are more a result of the introduction of universal suffrage in the 19th century. There are a wide range and many different types of parties which operate according to their national political culture. Even in the United Kingdom the political parties of Northern Ireland are different from those of Britain, and in Britain apart from the main line parties there are also other parties such as the nationalist parties of Scotland and Wales.

### **Features**

Some features are common to most parties for example they all represent particular groups or cleavages within their society. Yet to gain political power they must also be able to appeal to a wide section of the society. Parties are a channel and

an input into the political system for their supporters and they are able to aggregate their interests into a coherent programme. They provide the organisation for people to gather together and also to recruit members and select leaders and candidates.

Parties are more than organisations they become part of the belief system and the emotional identity of their members and supporters. These supporters develop a loyalty and commitment to the party which goes beyond the formal organisation and there can even be a dichotomy between the actual party organisation and the images held by the supporters. It is important for the party to be able to appeal to the emotions and aspirations of people and to be able to present some kind of image of a 'better' society. While parties become mainly organisational bodies they must still be able to offer emotional and doctrinal beliefs if they are to hold old, and recruit new supporters.

In the wider political system political parties are important for they draw people into the system and allow them to participate. This helps to develop a sense of belonging and prevents alienation. Minority groups which normally would be excluded are able to play a part in the system. Liberal democratic socialist parties in particular have been able to represent minorities, the needy and those disadvantaged by the society. While these parties emphasise equity and fairness other parties can also have similar values. In 1995 for the first time ever in Britain a Conservative Party M. P. resigned and joined the Labour Party for he believed that under the Conservative Government, "The poor have not shared as they should have done in the growth of the nation's wealth" (Howarth 1995). All parties however, not only elitist parties can leave certain items off the agenda. Parties are important as a vehicle to challenge, monitor and control those who hold wield power in the society including governments and economic and other interests. Parties can help to build up a democratic system and allow people to express their opinions about governments, as in 1995 in the first local government elections in South Korea when all cities except one were won by the opposition. Opposition parties are an essential, loyal part of the

democratic system and can be termed, 'Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition', as in the British Parliament. While an independent media is an important part of a democratic system it still needs the political parties to raise many of the issues which it would not or could not normally cover.

Parties are part of, and dependent upon the society and they must relate to the changes happening in the society but they can also have an impact upon that society in the short and long term. They must remain in touch with national needs and moods and be able to offer some kind of vision. Care however must be taken as parties try to appeal to a majority of the people through pluralist pragmatism that they do not lose their ideals and vision of the 'good' society, or their appeal to their traditional supporters.

### **Disillusionment**

There is growing disillusionment in several countries about the political system and political parties. Successive polls in Britain show the proportion of people believing that the system of government works well dropping from 48 to 33 to 22 per cent in 1995. In the same year an American poll found that nearly 80 per cent thought that the federal government was doing a poor or only a fair job of managing the country. In another poll in the USA 73 per cent said they believed that 'politicians work for themselves and their own careers not the people they represent'. A Japanese poll in 1994 showed that 61 per cent did not trust elected politicians. This same trend of distrust can be seen in the lowest turnout ever, in the Japanese Upper House election of 1995 when 53 per cent of the electorate abstained from voting. Parties are not highly rated in Japan as shown in a 1995 poll where 67 per cent said they voted on the basis of the personality and only 23 per cent on the basis of party. In the United States there is disillusionment with the two main parties as can be seen in the popularity of General Colin Powell in 1995, and the success of Ross Perot in 1992 and his continuing popularity. People are looking for alternatives.

Long serving governments and parties can run out of ideas and energy as in Britain with Labour in 1979 and the Conservatives in the 1990s. These movements raise questions about the relevance of main-line parties and how successful they are keeping in touch with their supporters and movements in the society. To help the position of political parties governments such as in Japan are starting to subsidise political parties from public funds. This however can also deepen the distrust of parties and strengthen the belief that they are only concerned to get as much as they can for themselves from the public purse.

### **Defects**

The academic literature on political parties, such as the famous study by Robert Michels (1911), discusses their "oligarchical tendencies". This is part of the elite view of politics as in Mosca and Pareto. It appears that when parties are founded they are based upon a great deal of idealism and equality but as they develop and become firmly established organisations, power and money become predominant concerns. Leaders and activists become motivated by a desire for office and position and the objectives of the party become secondary in their activities (Schumpeter 1944). Ramsay MacDonald, the leader of the British Labour Party was accused of betrayal when he became the Prime Minister of a coalition government which included the Conservatives in 1931 (Morgan 1989). In a similar way some felt that the party was secondary to Murayama when he became Prime Minister of a coalition government in 1994. Parties can become the tools of elites and of vested interests who retain their control by curtailing the democratic and participative nature of the party. The party can come to rely upon outdated dogmatism and be unresponsive to the needs of its members or of the society. This can also happen when parties become trapped in the organisation and the political system and they lose their ability to relate and respond to the wider society. Party beliefs can become only rhetoric and slogans while promises and platforms are not implemented (Duverger). Even when

leaders are honest it is not easy for them to meet party and public expectations and also face the often tough economic realities. Yet Rose (1984) claims the British governments despite harsh economic conditions normally implement party pledges.

These kinds of developments lead to a cynicism and distrust of political systems and parties. This is a serious attack on the liberal democratic tradition especially when competitive parties, reflecting the views of the people, are expected to be the basis of democratic systems of government. They are to represent the citizens and to control power groups in the society and maintain the stability of governments. That is one reason in Thailand why parliamentary candidates are required to belong to a political party rather than each member of parliament being able to act independently without any regard to the stability of the government. Interest groups are also an important ingredient but they cannot replace political parties.

### **Developments in the British Labour Party**

The party comes out of the urbanisation, industrialisation and the introduction of universal suffrage into 19th century Britain. Workers were beginning to organise themselves into trade unions, co-operative societies and political parties. The Communist Party failed to win any large following in Britain nearly all the workers supporting the Labour Party. 1945 saw the first successful Labour Government under Clement Attlee who pursued a radical programme of social welfare and nationalisation. After a Conservative period of government 1951-63, Labour was returned to power under Harold Wilson. This was a difficult period economically with labour disputes, strikes and divisions within the party. In 1981 a group of rightwing M.P.s broke away to form the Social Democratic Party. The Conservative Party was returned to power in 1979 under Margaret Thatcher who, like Attlee, pursued radical policies but this time of the rightwing. Until recently the Labour Party has had a bad image and received poor publicity due to its divisions and conflicts and the activities of leftwing groups at the local government and party branch level. The

party seemed undemocratic, dogmatic, controlled by vested interests and unable to gain majority electoral support, it lost general elections in 1979, 1983, 1988 and 1992.

### **Ideals and new Labour**

In the mid 1990s a 'New Labour' party has emerged out of the struggles and defeats of the previous decades. One key area has been that of ideals, belief and ideology and this is highlighted by the fight to change Clause Four of the party's constitution. This clause was seen by many in the party, and not only of the leftwing, as being the cardinal basis of the party. It was used by opponents of the party to attack the party, who said the clause proved that Labour was a party of dogmatic Marxism and Socialism. Several attempts were made to scrap or change Clause Four such as by the party leader Hugh Gaitskell in 1959 but these all failed. Harold Wilson, who later became leader, said of that attempt. "We are being asked to take Genesis out of the Bible. You don't have to be a fundamentalist to say that Genesis is part of the Bible".

Clause Four was part of the Constitution drafted in 1918 by Sidney Webb, and it committed the party to the "common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange". This was the basis for the huge programme of nationalisation undertaken by the Attlee government. At a special national conference of the party in 1995 this clause was replaced by new clauses. These committed the party to, "a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many, not the few", and "a dynamic economy, serving the public interest, in which the enterprise of the market and the rigor of competition are joined with the forces of partnership and cooperation to produce the wealth the nation needs."

The new clauses express concern for the whole society and the public interest and that wealth and opportunities will be available for the many and not just for the few. The importance of the market and competition however is accepted but with

recognition given to partnership and cooperation. New Labour stresses ethical socialism rather than Marxist determinism. There should be social justice, equality of opportunity but also cohesion and community. This is in contrast to the divisions, the overstress on individualism and the consequent cut back on community brought about by Thatcher Toryism. Ethical socialism is based upon principles and a vision of a strong, united society which gives every citizen the chance to develop their potential to the full. Power can come through principle and be used for the common good. If the vision is strong and principles relevant they can create a popular movement.

Ethical socialism is also linked with Christianity and it has been claimed that Christian Methodism has been more influential in the Labour Party than Marxism. This goes back to an attempt by Anglicans to establish Christian Socialism in 1848 and 1855 as a response to the secularism of Bentham and J. S. Mill. Frederic Donaldson said "Christianity is the religion of which socialism is the practice". R. H. Tawney and Archbishop William Temple were Christians who were part of this tradition. Holding similar beliefs are Tony Blair the current leader of the Labour Party and his predecessor, John Smith. This is reflected in their contributions to a book on the Christian faith and socialism published in 1993, entitled 'Reclaiming the Ground' (Bryant). In this Blair claims that radicals such as socialists want change and change also lies at the heart of Christianity. He is a member of the Christian Socialist Movement. Both the party and Christianity stress the duty to care for the needy and to release the potential of all people with no discrimination on the basis of race or other factor. There is an ethical strain in New Labour which reflects Christian teaching.

### **Leadership and new Labour**

Parties need a leader as well as ideals. This has always been so but the age of the mass media have made it more crucially important than ever. Leaders must be able to communicate the ideals of the party but the ideals are also involved, in the

image the public have of the leader. The leader must be in touch with the mood of the country and be able to create a vision and ideas which are relevant to the needs of the people and the society. It is the leader especially who must have the commitment, energy, and even the charisma to create the right image of the party and to win popular support. People must be able to respect, trust and believe in the leader. This is partly gained when leaders are prepared to fight for their vision and ideals and so to gain party support.

Tony Blair was elected as the Leader of the Labour Party in 1994, at the age of 41 years, on the death of John Smith. He has been an M.P., a member of the House of Commons, since 1983, so he is a relatively young man with comparatively limited experience. This does mean however that he has the appeal of youth and does not carry a great deal of constricting ideological baggage, or obligations of former leaders. Previous leaders such as Neil Kinnock and Smith helped to prepare the way for the reforms which Blair has been able to push through. His efforts have been central to the creation of 'New Labour' and his popularity rose within the party and in the polls. With his enthusiasm, idealism and youth he has been able to transform the image of the party. Margaret Thatcher was able to do something similar for the Conservative Party in 1979 with her strong convictions and personality. It was her ideals and beliefs rather than actual policies which were more important and so it is the same with Blair. One test of the good leader is the ability to gauge the public mood and to be able to formulate and to project a vision, ideals and ideas which answer this mood. Blair, like Wilson who won the election in 1963, has been able to project the vision of a new technologically dynamic caring Britain moving forward into a new and better age. Leaders however cannot work on their own they need a supportive organisation.

### **Organisation and new Labour**

The formal organisation of the party should be one of the main factors assur-



ing the vitality and relevance of the party to its supporters and the society. Over the past decades this has not been the situation with the Labour Party, and the organisation became a barrier to progress and did not sufficiently recognise the changing nature of British society, and this is one reason for the electoral success of the Conservative Party since 1979.

One problem has been the dominance of the party by trade unions as the main provider of funds, with the controlling vote in party national conferences and influence over the party Executive. The unions have been a conservative force, supporting Clause Four, the public corporations and public sector, and being against any attempt to restrict or reform union power. They were for example against the law to force a ballot of union members before strike action. Blair has told the unions that he would retain that law. The principle of one member one vote at the national conference has gradually been introduced and the union vote has been cut from 90 to 70 to 50 per cent of the conference vote.

Leaders have also had to work against, or to try and persuade leftwing groups within the party to support reform proposals. This has not been easy as leftwing and trade union leaders are strong personalities in their own-right and are experts in using party rules and organisation to achieve their objectives. Their objective in the past has often been to preserve the status quo and their own interests. Internal disputes have also damaged the standing of the party in public opinion.

The party has now recognised the need for change and has become more cohesive and democratic. One recognition of this was the election of Blair, a rightwinger, as Leader of the party, with 57 per cent of the vote. Cohesion was safeguarded by the election of a more traditional member of the left as the Deputy Leader. This particular election was seen as one of the most democratic party elections in the World with 1.3 million eligible voters of whom one in four voted. It received widespread coverage and was a big boost to 'new' Labour and to the new leader. This election and the national conferences of 1994 and 1995 and the vote on

Clause Four boosted the image of the party as democratic, dynamic and creative. 65.2 per cent voted for the Clause Four change, including 9 out of 10 of the rank and file members. 38 per cent of the union vote was for the change and 32 per cent against. Unions had 70 per cent of the vote. Party democracy, education and activism was boosted by the great number of meetings held throughout Britain at which Blair explained the new proposals. This was campaigning but it was also educational and allowed for rank and file participation. All this has helped to boost the membership of the party which reached 351,000 in October 1995, up 50 per cent since the election of Blair in July 1994. Earlier membership was low and it was often an artificial paper membership. Attendance at party meetings was poor and it was easy for leftwing activists to take control of local organisations. A successful party needs a good organisation but it also needs the right orientation.

### **Orientation and new Labour**

Orientation here is used in a wide sense to mean the direction towards which the party is inclined to lean, it involves values, objectives and priorities. It is the actual practice in contrast to the formal rules and procedures. For a party to be successful it must be orientated towards openness and responsiveness to the needs of party supporters and the society. Yet it is also the dedication, zeal and belief of those same supporters who give it this positive orientation and make it a dynamic party. A positive orientation needs to imbue the culture of the organisation.

A party may have vision, ideals and a good leader but it must also have the orientation which enables it to stay in touch with an ever changing society. One characteristic of organisations, including political parties, is the tendency for them to become rigid and resistant to change. They start to exist only to support the status quo and vested interests who benefit from their existence. Organisations such as the Labour Party can become conservative in outlook and remain dogmatically tied to outdated beliefs and practices. Loyalty to these 'true' beliefs and to the organisation

become more highly valued than new ideas or vitality. In 1993 the Australian Labor Party unexpectedly won the general election and the Prime Minister claimed it was due to the work of the "true believers". In Britain, unlike Japan, the orientation of the Labour Party started to change gradually encouraged by successive leaders and election defeats.

A significant sign of the change was the dropping of Clause Four. As Blair expressed it, Leftist parties the world over had lost their way. "We confused means with ends, allowing one economic prescription to eclipse the aims it was supposed to serve." This orientation to change is also a sign of a dedication and honesty to the basic ideals of the party and a desire to apply them to the "new Britain". It has aided democratisation and participation which has helped to stimulate and give new energy to the party. Early socialists tended to believe that governments could remove all social and economic evils. New Labour under Blair recognises that there are limits upon government and so took care not to make unrealistic promises.

### **New Labour and the future**

Blair has been successful in projecting an image of a radical centre anti establishment party yet he has also been able to appeal to the middle class with measures such as fighting crime and the high employment of 2.6 million. He has been able to cast aside the image of a party lost in class warfare, controlled by the unions and the dogmatic socialism of clause four. There are criticisms of Blair and of new Labour; of an over dependence on Blair and the dangers of a presidential style, over centralisation, consulting only his own supporters, of closed decision making, of neglecting the socialist basis of the party. Critics claim he has forgotten that there is still an enemy to fight, capitalism and exploitation still has to be struggled against. Furthermore the new members do not include many young people. The real test of the new Labour Party, its leader, its ideals, organisation and whether it is in touch with British society, is whether it can persuade the electorate, including younger

people to vote Labour. Is it possible for the party to retain the necessary orientation which it needs to keep the ideals, leadership and organisation in touch and responsive to the needs of British society or will it follow the "iron law of oligarchy"?

### **Developments in the Social Democratic Party of Japan**

The SDPJ has similar roots to the British Labour Party growing out of industrialisation, urbanisation and the granting of adult male suffrage in 1925. There were the links with the trade unions and even with Christians, such as Toyohiko Kagawa who was active in founding agricultural cooperatives and unions and protesting against the atrocious working conditions of the time. In its present form the party dates from 1955, when right and leftwing groups joined together to form a united party against the newly formed conservative party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

### **Ideals and the SDPJ**

The formal ideology of the party was Marxist following the Michi platform put together between 1962-4. In practice however and especially from 1955 the ideals were shaped more by an opposition to the LDP, on almost every issue, than by any formal ideology. The party for example was opposed to the LDP interpretation of the postwar Japanese Constitution, and stood strongly by its pacifist nature, and therefore regarded the Self Defense Force (SDF) as being unconstitutional. They endorsed their antiwar stance in their Seventh party convention in 1951 and said that 'non-armament and neutrality' should be the basis for the party's policies. They were against the Japan American Security Treaty and in favour of peace with all nations including the Communist nations. These pacifist beliefs have been widely supported in Japan since the end of World War Two, not least because of Japan's experience of the two atomic bombs. The problem has been, as it was with the Labour Party, that no attempt was made to interpret the ideals according to the changing national and

international conditions. In 1986 the party did drop the socialist title from its English name, but not in the Japanese, to try and improve its image. It still continued however to be pro Soviet and anti the United States. Yet many Socialists at the local government level were aware of local needs and when in power, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, attempted to implement their ideas and ideals.

Because its ideals had never changed over the years and it had always strongly opposed the LDP, so it was a terrible shock to members and supporters when the party leader took the position as Prime Minister in a coalition government dominated by the LDP, and started to discard party ideals and policies. This created a great deal of cynicism among party members and the electorate. For example the Prime Minister accepted the SDF as being constitutional. Other policies were overthrown such as the opposition to any rise in the consumption tax, and the development of nuclear energy for power supplies.

Since 1994 various groups within the party have been trying to formulate a new philosophical basis for the SDPJ. Among the broad principles which have been suggested are a commitment to a "fair and equitable society working for the interest of workers and consumers,... with the rights of the individual respected, and in which there would be a sense of solidarity among the people". The party should also aim to get the society out of bureaucratic politics, that is out of system where policies are directed by business interests, and into a highly advanced welfare state in which the stress would be on the consumer. As in Britain, it was felt that the community was being broken up and there was not the sense of all belonging together. These principles also reflect the belief that since the end of World War Two, governments and bureaucrats have placed the interests of workers and consumers behind those of business. It was suggested that administrative reform, deregulation and access to public information should all be used to control bureaucratic government. Some regulation however should be retained to protect those who were socially weak. Participatory democracy and devolution to local government were also considered to be important

principles.

On the international side it was suggested that positive contributions be made for programmes in economic, environmental and human rights and in non military fields, and that the UN should not just be concerned with peace keeping. The party should continue to support the ideals and spirit of the pacifist Constitution and disarmament in Japan and the World.

In 1995 the party in an extraordinary national convention approved the changing, or dropping of various policies. It was accepted that the ideals and the policies should be different from the conservative parties and should stress democracy and pacifism as based in the Constitution with an emphasis on the international community and World peace. There should be greater social equity and a fairer deal for households and consumers.

### **Leadership and the SDPJ**

One reason for the party failing to update its ideals or to communicate them to contemporary Japan and the World has been the lack of leadership in providing the vision and ideas to show their relevance. The power of the leaders is restricted and they have to contend with factions as they do in Britain, and this can lead to the loss of power, as when the Socialist Prime Minister was forced to resign in 1948. In Japan as elsewhere leaders are essential to provide the vision and the image of the party which is needed in the age of mass communications. This is difficult for party leaders for by the time they reach the position they have become so socialised by, and so much part of, the party organisation, that theirs is a tunnel vision which prevents them from playing the leadership role required. Leaders are elected on the basis of their seniority and support in the party, not on the basis of ideas, ideals, vision or energy. They tend to be elderly, conservative, supporters of the status quo and to be trapped in obligations to supporters, special interests and to factions. Murayama was 69 years old when he was elected as Party Chairman in 1993. One of the main

functions of the leader is to keep the party together and this is normally done through consensus and compromise, not through radical new ideas.

There is a tradition in Japan for leaders to accept responsibility when things go wrong and to resign. So in 1993 when the party suffered heavy losses in the general election, the party leader Mrs. Takako Doi who had become leader in 1986, resigned. Tomiichi Murayama was elected as the new leader but he did not resign after heavy party losses in the Upper House election of 1995. The Party Council said no one person was really to blame but they all had some responsibility. Murayama said it was his responsibility to stay as Prime Minister to prevent a political vacuum and to ensure that the budget was passed. He claimed that SDPJ participation in the government had modified LDP policies. Yet during this period many of the ideals and basic policies of the SDPJ had been dropped by his Government. The nation needs leadership based on ideals and vision not on personal ambitions and expediency.

The obsession with staying in office means that there has virtually been no leadership in the party and it has drifted since 1993. It has not been possible for others in the party to take decisive action because of the lack of support from the leadership. Murayama has had no vision, or any sense of urgent concern for the future of the party. There have been delays in the establishment of a new party despite other new parties being established. Murayama is not concerned for he says he does not intend to stand again as leader. The lack of purpose and energy in the leader is also apparent in the party organisation.

### **Organisation and the SDPJ**

The SDPJ organisation, like the Labour Party, has been conservative in sticking to its beliefs and practices and in supporting the status quo. It has failed to interpret party ideals in the light of the changing conditions of Japan. It is not a mass membership party and is dependent upon the trade unions for financial and organisational

support particularly during election campaigns. While union support has given the party a nation wide basis it has also allowed union leaders to gain party nomination to safe Parliamentary seats. The unions, and leftwing factions within the party, each with their own interests left little freedom to the organisation to respond to needs in the society. Leftwing groups were strong in the party after rightwingers broke away to form the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) in 1960. The party allows considerable freedom to the branches and national conferences can also be quite free in their criticism.

The party has been the largest opposition party since the end of the war and has always attracted a large loyal vote which even in 1995 was 6.88 million compared to 11 million for the LDP and 12.5 million for the Shinshinto Party. As an organisation the party has fulfilled democratic functions even if it has not sufficiently responded to the changes and needs in the society. In 1995 it was proposed that the organisation of the proposed new party would have a national headquarters, 11 regional committees, 47 prefectural blocs and 300 branches based on the electorates of the new Lower House. Whether a new party and organisation can be more successful in elections is doubtful unless there is dynamic leadership and a change in the orientation of the party.

### **Orientation and the SDPJ**

The orientation of the party has been inward looking, with priorities given to keeping the organisation united by consensus and compromise. Priority has been given to gaining or retaining positions and scoring points against the LDP through the parliament and media. The orientation has not been towards the needs of supporters or the society, there has not been the openness to outside ideas and people. At the national level the party has been orientated by its dependence upon the unions, leftwing groups and the adherence to outdated ideology. Seniority has dominated and the hierarchy has supported the status quo.



In 1963 the Secretary General of the party admitted that they were failing to provide the organisation and leadership for the daily party activities and failing in the mobilisation of popular support and mass movements. He stated the party was dominated by its full-time politicians from the local and national level and was financially dependent upon the unions. So this situation gave a certain orientation to the party and curtailed potential volunteer party activists. It also help to explain why party membership was only 152,000 in 1992.

Since 1993 there have been attempts to change the orientation of the party and to introduce a new sense of purpose. It has been difficult to get members to express an interest in the new party because of the image and orientation of the SDPJ. To many voter the party appears to be similar to other parties with no distinctive ideals or policies after the changes introduced by Murayama. It is not surprising that the party won only 16 of the 126 seats available in the Upper House in 1995, or that several SDPJ members stood as independent candidates, in this and in the 1995 local elections. Several of the unions also deserted the party. The party appears to have no real orientation as suggested in the vote supporting the fundamental policy changes at the extraordinary National Convention in 1995. 222 delegates voted for the changes on the SDF and the US Security Treaty but 152 were opposed. There was opposition from delegates from Okinawa, Hiroshima and leftwing groups. A possibility that the Prime Minister would resign helped to get the motion accepted. More serious for the future of the party is the lack of any clear sense of purpose or vision. Nor does it have the energy to lessen its dependence on the unions or to utilise the network of local civic organisations and the cooperative movement with its membership of 18 million.

### **Decline and Revival**

Political parties are still an essential part of modern liberal democratic states, whether they are classified as new right, elitist, pluralist or neo-pluralist. As states

become more complex and remote they need more than ever parties which can act as a channel for citizen's participation and input and help to prevent alienation and anomie. "The principal feature of an active democracy is not voting but active political participation" (Self 1993, 258). The abuse of power does not grow any less, and cohesive well organised and effectively led parties can help to monitor, challenge and control other power groups including governments. It is important that parties are independent of other groups so they can perform this essential control function. Parties of the left and centre, and with ideals are still required to stop exploitation, and to protect the interests of those disadvantaged and the needy. Economic forces are more potent and potentially destructive than ever before, damaging the moral, cultural and natural environment, they are organised globally. Market forces, competition and interest groups are not sufficient to control these huge international groups and forces (Galbraith 1976). Parties are essential but if they are to stop their decline and experience revival in their ideals, leadership and organisation they must have the right orientation.

Parties are founded on ideals but these must be relevant to their supporters and the wider society for if they are not the party will start to decline. The Labour Party revival is based on projecting ideals which speak to the voters and appeals not only to their intellect but also to their emotions. Parties in Britain and Japan cannot become catch-all parties as in the United States for there are still ideological differences. In Britain there are still social cleavages and in the past decades widening gaps between the rich and poor with a growing under class. Labour has been able to achieve an acceptable balance between its ideologically based ideals and the needs of British society, the SDPJ has yet to achieve this. As seen in Japan since 1993, the ideals and ideas of a party are important to differentiate it from other parties and this becomes particularly important when the party is in coalition with other parties. This differentiation is a major responsibility of the party leader.

Leadership is an important factor in the decline or revitalisation of a party.

In these days of the mass media particularly, the leader must be able to project an image of a party of ideals and energy which is in touch with the needs of the voter. Tony Blair has been able to do this for the Labour Party for he has the ability and drive, and a sense of mission which has been able to unite and revitalise the party. This has not happened with the SDPJ. Leadership is more than images it is also about integrity and about a willingness to fight for ideals and to remain free from the corruption of power, position and money.

Party organisations can take on a life of their own paying only lip service to formal objectives but in practice existing only to protect positions and personal interests including the leadership. Organisations can be self perpetuating and there can be a symbiotic relationship with leaders based on power and maintaining the status quo. The revival of the Labour Party, unlike the SDPJ, has seen the organisation working to become open and responsive to the needs and ideas of its supporters. Through the organisation the members have been able to challenge and select their leaders. While the party may be made up of many groups and factions the organisation must be flexible and strong enough to maintain the unity and vitality of the party.

Political parties must be orientated towards openness and change. Society is always changing so parties must respond through their ideals, leaders and organisations. It is easy for parties to become trapped in some historic time capsule. The Labour Party has been able to boost its electoral appeal because it is seen to be in touch with contemporary society. The correct orientation will mean that the whole activity of the party is outward looking, its objectives and priorities will be to keep the party open and responsive. This can only be achieved if the membership and supporters participate actively in the organisation, whether through research, education, open discussion, policy formulation and implementation, or decision taking. To avoid oligarchy and to render their essential function in a democratic system of government political parties must have the right orientation through their ideals, leadership and organisation.

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