

insist that its operation should be imbued with liberal values. SVS, vol. 132 (1910), p 247.

- 127 In a different context, the critique of Weber's model of bureaucracy for its inflexibility has been a frequent theme of modern theories of administration and management. For useful summaries of the literature, see M Albro, *Bureaucracy* (London, 1970) and P M Blau, *Bureaucracy in Modern Society* (New York, 1956).

Chapter 4

Parliament and Democracy

The ambivalent character Weber ascribed to bureaucracy—its indispensability for handling the complex tasks of modern society on the one hand, its tendency to exceed its function as an administrative instrument on the other—defined for him one of the main problems of modern politics: how to keep the bureaucracy subject to political control. The answer lay in the kind of politician who would be able to subordinate the apparatus to political direction, and in the conditions necessary to his development. As shown in the previous chapter, opposite to Weber's account of the typical official stood a conception of the 'model' politician, who was capable of taking personal responsibility for a policy and its consequences. In 'Politics as a Vocation' Weber defined the qualities necessary to this type as being a combination of passion with 'Sachlichkeit': the determination to fight for a cause he believed in, combined with a very practical and down-to-earth knowledge of the means by which it could be attained.¹ Control over the bureaucracy required the development of politicians with these capacities. Though this was partly a question of cultural and personal factors, development of such qualities also depended on the political structure. Central in this was the constitutional position of Parliament. Weber drew a basic distinction between, on the one hand, what he called 'token' constitutionalism or Parliamentarism, exemplified by Russia and Germany, where a Parliament of weak powers could produce neither the personnel nor the training for political leadership, and the strong Parliament of the British type on the other hand, to which the government was constitutionally answerable, and membership of which formed the normal avenue to governmental office.

This contrast between the two types of Parliamentary system formed part of Weber's theory of democracy and of his justification for democratising the German constitution. In this he again shared

a view common to the younger generation of the Verein für Sozialpolitik, who advocated the introduction of universal suffrage in Prussia, and strengthening the powers of Parliament in the states and the Reich itself.² Yet here Weber was distinctive in regarding democratisation not so much as a means to giving more power to the people, but rather as a means to providing more effective political direction of the state apparatus. Although he only produced a fully developed theory of political institutions in his wartime writings, first evidence of it occurs much earlier, in his articles on Russia. One of the conclusions which he reached in his analysis of Russian politics, that monarchy as a system was incapable of providing consistent leadership in the face of modern bureaucracy,³ had a clear bearing on the German situation. In a letter to Friedrich Naumann in 1908 he repeated the point, made in the Russian articles, that a legitimate ruler could only be a dilettante, and argued that, without the removal of the 'personal regime' of the Kaiser, Germany would be incapable of producing a foreign policy of any consequence.⁴ In a further letter from the same period he urged Naumann not to exaggerate the significance of the Kaiser's personal failings; it was the *institutions* that were at fault.⁵ Germany had desperate need for organisational change, and Weber went on to advocate an end to token constitutionalism by making the 'Bundestrat' into a fully-fledged Parliament. This account broadly anticipated the theme of his wartime writings, and needed only to be completed by the more explicit emphasis on the function of a strong Parliament as a recruiting and training ground for political leadership, that followed from his closer acquaintance with the British system of government.⁶ While the account which follows is drawn from Weber's wartime writings, therefore, its main features were established earlier.

PARLIAMENT AS A TRAINING GROUND FOR POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

The difference between 'token' and strong Parliamentary institutions forms a central theme of Weber's articles on 'Parliament and Government in a Reconstructed Germany'.⁷ His starting point was with the common function of Parliaments everywhere in expressing the consent of the governed to their government:

A certain minimum of consent, at least of the socially important classes among the governed, is a precondition for the permanence of even the best organised systems of rule. Parliaments

are nowadays the means for giving outward expression to this minimum of consent.⁸

However, it was the differences in the constitutional position of Parliaments that were significant. On this depended the whole character of politics as well as the development of political leadership. If a Parliament was limited to the role of refusing financial or legislative approval to the government, or of presenting petitions on behalf of the subjects, that is to token constitutionalism, it could not participate positively in the work of government. Its members could only carry on 'negative' politics: could only stand over against the government as a hostile power, be fed by it with the absolute minimum of information, be treated as an obstacle...⁹ It was different with a Parliament where the government was either directly chosen from its members, or had to maintain the support of the majority to remain in office, and hence be responsible to Parliament for the conduct and approval policy. This was Parliamentary government in the true sense. 'In this case the leaders of the dominant parties are necessarily positive sharers in state power. Parliament is then a factor of *positive* politics...'¹⁰

The characteristic type of politics fostered by weak Parliamentary institutions was what Weber called in the passage above and in his other writings of the period 'negative politics'. According to this, political parties and their leaders, excluded from sharing in real power, were confined to complaint and protest, and to the negative role of reacting to proposals initiated elsewhere.¹¹ 'Negative politics' had two distinct manifestations. One was that the energy of politicians was largely directed towards securing minor administrative posts for party members. Politics always involved a striving for personal power; but where the system excluded elected representatives from positions of real power, their attention became absorbed in minor office. 'Everything revolves round the patronage of minor subordinate positions'.¹² These were the sops with which the bureaucracy reconciled them to the system of bureaucratic rule. The height of endeavour became 'to alter a few paragraphs of the budget in the interests of a party's electorate, and to ensure a handful of sinecures for the protégés of the party bigwigs'.¹³ The other feature of a weak Parliament was that it encouraged politics of an extreme ideological tone, in which the consequences of politics were never adequately considered. The unrealistic posturing of politicians was a consequence both of their lack of power and of their being denied

access to information on which realistic policies could be based. 'Either ignorant demagogy or routinised impotence . . . hold the stage'.¹⁴ Thus, for example, the 'unpolitical brotherhood ethic of class comradeship' that already held elements of the SPD in its grip, in their determination to have nothing to do with the capitalist system, was reinforced by a Parliamentary system which encouraged opposition for its own sake, since representatives were never in the position to have to take responsibility for the consequences of what they proposed.¹⁵

'Negative politics' could be said to be a type of politics in the purely neutral sense in which Weber defined it, of striving to influence the exercise of leadership and the distribution of power. It could have some influences on the course of policy even if only through the exercise of a kind of veto. But in terms of politics as defined in the 'ideal type' of politician—one who pursues power in order to exercise personal responsibility—it was not real politics at all, since the power to make that responsibility a reality was lacking.¹⁶ Further, just as the position of Parliament determined the character of politics, so it encouraged the types who would be suited to this kind of activity: placemen who sought office without the responsibility of power, and demagogues who did not have to weigh the consequences of their speeches. These were the antithesis of the true politician. Such men won supremacy under a system of negative politics, which operated a kind of 'negative selection', diverting all major talents into other fields of activity.¹⁷ Thus on the rare occasions when a weak Parliament had the opportunity to assert itself positively, as the German Reichstag in the Chancellor crisis of 1917, it could do so only in a haphazard and disorganised manner, 'like an uprising of slaves', since it lacked the leaders to give direction to its newfound upsurge of political will.¹⁸

If 'negative' politics was the typical form of politics in weak Parliaments, 'positive' politics, involving the exercise of political responsibility, was typical of strong Parliamentary systems, in which the government was recruited from Parliament and was directly answerable to it. In such a system the chief function of Parliament was as a recruiting and training ground ('Auslesestätte') for future political leaders.¹⁹ Weber regarded this as the most impressive feature of the British Parliament. By a process of selection from its ranks politicians had come to the fore who had succeeded in subordinating a quarter of mankind to the rule of a tiny minority—and voluntarily at that!²⁰ A strong Parliamentary system attracted men with the capacity for leadership ('Führer-

naturen'), because Parliament was recognised as the normal route to office with its exercise of personal responsibility.

In emphasising the function of a strong Parliament as a recruiting ground for leadership, Weber sought to defend it from challenges from both the Right and the Left. Both argued from a common dislike of the pettiness and place-seeking of German Parliamentary life, but drew different conclusions from this. The Right argued that a Parliamentary system was essentially un-German, or else that the Germans were not yet ready for it; the Left advocated a system of direct democracy, without the mediation of Parliament. Against the former view that the nation was either unique or constitutionally unsuited to Parliamentary institutions, Weber insisted that the low level of political ability in Germany was a consequence of the institutional weakness of the Reichstag, and could not be laid at the door of Parliamentarism as such.²¹ Up till that time, said Weber at the end of 'Parliament and Government', there had been no room for men of leadership qualities in the German Parliaments. It was therefore unfair to deduce that the nation was unripe for Parliamentary government: 'It is the height of political dishonesty to complain of the "negative" politics of the Parliaments, and at the same time to block the way for men of leadership capacity to play a positive part and exercise responsible power with the backing of a Parliamentary following.'²² The low level of political ability in Germany was thus a consequence, not a cause—a consequence of institutions which had been designed at least partly to prevent men of calibre from emerging through the process of Parliamentary politics.²³

From the Left the inadequacy of Parliament was also criticised, though not in the name of authoritarianism but of direct democracy and government by referendum. The 'democrats' objected not only to the careerism of Parliamentary politics but also to its voluntary character, in that it involved a distinction between a few 'active' and the majority of 'passive' participants. Weber answered them in his other major polemic of the wartime period, 'Suffrage and Democracy in Germany'. 'There are', he said, 'many upright and even fanatical "democrats", who see in Parliamentarism a system for careerists and spongers, leading to the perversion of democracy and the rule of cliques.'²⁴ For these, only 'true' democracy could provide an administration which would serve the needs of the broad masses of the nation. But there were two questions they must answer:

First, if the power of Parliament is removed, what organ is left

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to democracy to control the administration of officials? ... Secondly, what does it put in place of the rule of Parliamentary cliques? The rule of even more inaccessible ... cliques. The system of so-called direct democracy is technically only possible in small states or cantons. In every mass state democracy leads to bureaucratic administration, and, without the introduction of a strong Parliament, to bureaucratic rule.²⁵

For Weber, leadership recruited and developed in Parliament provided the only means of controlling the administration. This was the only viable form that democracy could take under modern conditions.

Besides serving as a recruiting ground for political leaders, a strong Parliament also provided the means for training them. Here again Britain provided the model. An essential instrument in this training was the system of inquiry by committees, armed with the right to probe the administration and scrutinise relevant documents.²⁶ Such a system ensured the accountability of the administration to Parliament and provided a direct check on the civil service. Since knowledge formed the major source of bureaucratic power, the opportunity to share in their knowledge and expertise was necessary to controlling them effectively. Taking part in committee work was therefore the best form of training for a future political leader, as the British system indicated:

It is only this school of intensive work in the realities of administration . . . that equips an assembly to be a selecting ground, not for mere demagogues, but for effective politicians with a grasp of reality, of which the English Parliament is the supreme example. Only this kind of relationship between officials and professional politicians guarantees the continuous control of the administration, and through this the political education of both leaders and led.²⁷

Naturally such scrutiny was resented by the officials, since it conflicted with their norm of official secrecy, but it was a necessary condition for the development of political leadership, as opposed to demagogy and dilettantism.²⁸

Weber's answer to bureaucratic control was thus based on a contrast between two kinds of Parliamentary system—the weak or 'token' Parliament typified by Germany, the strong by England—and the typical consequences of each for the style of politics and the character of political leadership. His concern to change the character of German politics and its politicians likewise depended

on institutional reform, in particular of those paragraphs of the constitution that limited the role of Parliament, such as the notorious Article 9, section 2, which debarred a member of the Reichstag from holding governmental office and cut him off from his political base if he accepted it.²⁹ Weber was not so simple as to believe that similar political institutions produced similar consequences in all countries. France enjoyed Parliamentary government in the full sense, yet its parties were chronically fragmented and incapable of producing the kind of political leadership Weber expected from a Parliamentary system. But this was a consequence of her particular social structure. 'France is not the country', Weber argued, 'where the *typical* consequences of democracy for Parliamentarism can be studied'.³⁰ Nor did he believe that the alteration of a few clauses of the German Constitution would produce political leadership overnight. The habits of mind, the 'will to powerlessness', inculcated over generations could not be changed easily. Yet institutional reform was a *necessary* condition, in that it would remove the obstacles to the development of leadership:

No one should imagine that a paragraph of this kind, which linked the appointment and dismissal of the Reichskanzler to a Parliamentary vote, could suddenly conjure up 'leaders' out of the ground, when these have been excluded from Parliament for decades because of its powerlessness. But the essential prerequisites for this can be institutionally created, and everything now depends on this being done.³¹

It should be said that the contrast between the British and German systems of government was a commonplace of German political analysis, and that the British Parliament was an accepted model for those who advocated democratic reform. In this sense there was nothing particularly original about Weber's typology. However, Weber had his own way of setting the commonplace in a new light by approaching it from a different perspective. Here, the distinctive feature of Parliamentary government emphasised by Weber was not so much that it was more 'democratic', but that it developed the kind of leadership capable of controlling a modern bureaucracy. It is true that he spoke of the process of giving power to Parliament as 'democratisation', and that his strong Parliamentary type included distinctively democratic features, such as the power to subject the activity of government to public scrutiny. But his theory of Parliamentary government cannot be called a *democratic* theory, since it did not seek to justify such government

in terms of recognisably democratic values, such as increasing the influence of the people on the policies pursued by those who governed. The peculiarity of Weber's position consisted in his belief that under modern conditions formally democratic institutions provide the best guarantee of vigorous political leadership. Thus, although he could align himself with radical democrats, his commitment to the institutions of democracy was only a contingent one, not a matter of principle. How far this was so, was shown in a letter to Professor Ehrenberg in 1917:

Forms of constitution are for me technical means like any other machinery. I'd be just as happy to take the side of the monarch against Parliament, if only he were a *politician* or showed signs of becoming one.³²

This remark is no doubt an exaggeration, since the whole point of Weber's opposition to the monarch was to the *system*, and not to the person; an exceptional monarch might provide political leadership, but the monarchy as such could not guarantee continuity of political direction in the way that a Parliament could. Further, as will be discussed later in the chapter, Weber saw important advantages in a Parliamentary system as a guarantee of political liberty. Nevertheless, the letter is a clear indication of the priority he gave to political leadership in his theory.

Weber's discussion of Parliamentary institutions demonstrates his characteristic emphasis on the process of selection, on the way in which different institutional and social structures encouraged and selected different types and qualities of person. Whereas a weak Parliamentary system drove men of leadership quality away from politics, and encouraged 'mere demagogues' and those concerned with petty patronage, a strong Parliament brought a very different type of politician to dominance. Underlying this distinction was the more general assumption that what mattered in politics, as elsewhere, was the few people at the top; indeed, that oligarchy was inevitable, and that therefore the quality and character of the oligarchy was of the first importance. The empirical side to this assumption—the inevitability of oligarchy—will be examined more explicitly in the context of Weber's account of mass politics and universal suffrage, which forms the second aspect to his theory of democracy.

MASS DEMOCRACY AND ELITES

If part of Weber's theory of democracy consisted in his account

of Parliamentary institutions, the other part lay in his justification for universal suffrage and his account of mass democracy. Here again, Weber's theory was distinctive, both in the character of his justification for universal suffrage and also in his insistence that its introduction did not alter, but only reinforce, what he called 'the law of the small number', the law that politics was controlled by small groups from above.³³ As with other so-called 'elite theorists',³⁴ the involvement of the mass in politics was not regarded by Weber as modifying the fact of oligarchy, but rather the methods by which the few were selected, the type of person who reached the top and the qualities necessary for the effective exercise of power. The advent of democracy changed the rules of selection, but not the process of selection itself.

Weber's discussion of mass democracy introduces a further feature which he regarded as typical of modern politics alongside bureaucracy: its mass character. As well as being typified by bureaucratic administration, the modern state is also the mass state, in the sense that the mass cannot be ignored in the political process, whatever the type of constitution. The term 'mass' was used in his political writings in rather different senses. Sometimes it indicated merely an aggregation of large numbers, as in the term 'Massenstaat', which indicated a major power, or when he spoke of 'the mass as such, whatever social classes compose it in any particular instance'.³⁵ At the same time, the term usually also indicated something about the character of such aggregations and the society of which they were a part. The 'mass' was the product of the process of social levelling, which had dissolved the traditional distinctions of birth and status, and destroyed the relationships of traditional society.³⁶ The existence of the 'mass' was thus itself an indication of democratisation, in one sense of that term. Weber drew a familiar distinction between the social and the political aspects of democracy, between the levelling of social distinctions on the one hand, and the introduction of universal suffrage and Parliamentary government on the other. Social democratisation was already far advanced, and was being reinforced by the growth of mass literacy and the popular press. It was these factors that made the 'mass' significant for politics, irrespective of the type of constitution, and even where there was no political democracy. The appeal to the mass by propaganda and demagoguery was as much a feature of monarchies and dictatorships as of political democracies. It was a standard feature of German government, particularly as a weapon in the internal struggle between contending departments or governmental

factions.³⁷ Mass demagogy was also a typical instrument of the military dictatorships which, Weber argued, to a greater or lesser degree came to dominate all the contending nations in the World War.³⁸ The appeal to the masses was thus not confined to political democracies.

What differed, however, was the manner in which the mass became involved. It could be activated in a spasmodic and 'irrational' manner, as in the 'politics of the streets' or the appeal of a dictator.³⁹ Weber regarded the U-boat agitation in wartime Germany as a typical example of the damaging effects of such mass involvement in issues which required careful strategic calculation. Alternatively, the mass could be activated in a regular and disciplined way through constitutional means in a political democracy. What distinguished political democracy was not the fact of mass involvement, but the manner of it: the use of demagogy was linked to the regular exercise of the vote for choosing a leader, and to the organisation of the mass by political parties.

Demagogy... is independent of the type of constitution... Monarchies have also trod the road of demagogy in their own way. Speeches, telegrams, all the possible means of propaganda are mobilised to protect their prestige, and no one can maintain that this form of political propaganda has proved any less prejudicial to state interests than electoral demagogy, even of the most violent conceivable kind. In fact just the opposite. And now in wartime we have experienced the phenomenon, novel even for us, of demagogy by the admiral... So one cannot conclude that demagogy is a peculiarity of political democracies... In Germany we have demagogy and mob influence without democracy—or rather *because* of the lack of an ordered democracy.⁴⁰

Weber's justification for political democracy here was thus not so much that it would give the masses an influence they would not otherwise enjoy,⁴¹ but that their involvement in politics would be orderly and regular rather than spasmodic and 'irrational'.⁴² There were other reasons also why he favoured universal suffrage, and these are set out most coherently in his article 'Wahlrecht und Demokratie'. Here he argued that anything short of universal suffrage was incompatible with the character of modern institutions. A basic presupposition of these institutions—capitalism, bureaucracy, the state itself—was that men shared a formal equality of status, and that there were no special privileges recognised or guaranteed by law. Equal suffrage was merely an

extension of this principle. 'It is no accident', he wrote, 'that the demand for universal suffrage is with us. This equality corresponds in its mechanical character with the nature of the modern state. It is only with the modern state that the concept of "state citizen" comes into being.'⁴³ He went on to link this concept to citizenship with the obligation to take part in military service, and the equality between men in the face of death. This was a consideration particularly prominent in wartime. Weber continually denounced the Prussian three-class suffrage, and the anomaly of allowing political rights to those who stayed at home which were denied to soldiers at the front. But there was a more general historical point. Citizenship and political rights were historically associated with differences in men's capacity to provide their own military equipment. Such differences no longer existed, since, in the army as in other modern institutions, men no longer owned the equipment they used:

All men are equal in the face of death... All inequalities of political rights in the past stemmed ultimately from the economically related inequalities of *military* qualification, which no longer have any place in the bureaucratised state and army.⁴⁴

Thus universal suffrage and mass democracy followed on from, and were made necessary by, the prior process of social democratisation that was already far advanced. Given the nature of modern society, there was no basis for any suffrage short of universal. In his various writings Weber showed himself to have thoroughly mastered the intricacies of 'suffrage politics'—the multifarious schemes to keep the masses disenfranchised based upon property, occupation, education and what not. In 'Wahlrecht und Demokratie' he examined each of these in turn, and showed that none had any viable basis in the character of society.⁴⁵ Once the agitation for an extension of the vote had begun, the only end possible was universal suffrage; people might as well recognise this at once, and save their energy for other issues.⁴⁶ Political democracy, then, for Weber, followed from the formal equality presupposed by the institutions of modern society, and was necessary if the masses were to be involved in an orderly way in the political process rather than by spasmodic and 'irrational' interventions.

If universal suffrage was in the long run unavoidable for modern states, its introduction did not alter, but only reinforce, what Weber called the 'law of the small number', the universal principle that politics is dominated by small groups. 'Everywhere the principle of the small number—that is, the superior political manoeuvre-

ability of small *leading groups*—determines political activity.⁴⁷ The assertion of this principle forms one of the common links between *Economy and Society* and Weber's political writings, where it is insisted on equally.⁴⁸ Policy is always determined by a few, who then involve others only to the extent that their support is judged necessary, a principle which is as true of democracies as any other form of government. The mass only becomes involved as a result of initiatives from above, never from below; their role is limited to that of response.

It is not a question of the politically passive 'mass' throwing up a leader of itself, but rather of the political leader recruiting a following and winning the mass by demagogic appeal. This is true even in the most democratic constitutions.⁴⁹

The 'law of the small number' did not mean that leaders could dispense with a following, or that the following might not need to be large and enthusiastic, as for example in wartime. It meant that the initiatives always lay with the 'small leading groups', whose command of a 'staff' and ability to plan a strategy in secret ensured them the advantage. At most, a following might enjoy an occasional veto power.

Weber was less than explicit about how far the 'law of the small number' applied to the direct democracies of ancient Athens, and the Swiss cantons. Although they might have their 'Caesarist' demagogues or their traditional aristocracies, he insisted on drawing a sharp distinction between these types of democracy, based upon neighbourhood and personal relationships, and the modern mass democracies.⁵⁰ Though it might be possible to produce a definition of the term 'democracy' that included both (for example, that democracy is where 'no formal inequality of political rights exists between the social classes'),⁵¹ this was too general to be useful; modern mass democracy could be called 'democratic' in only a derivative sense. When compared with the oligarchies it had replaced, the advent of universal suffrage had not made politics any more democratic in the sense of any greater diffusion of power; if anything power was more concentrated. The term 'democratisation' could thus be misleading, Weber wrote, since the *demos* could never rule, only be ruled. What had changed was the manner in which the small number was selected, the qualities required of it, the chance for a different type of person to reach the top.⁵²

Weber's account of mass democracy is thus an account of the new elite roles brought about by the advent of universal suffrage,

and the qualities required for these. The classical analysis of the effect of the mass vote on the character of political activity was Ostrogorski's study of Britain and the USA, and Weber borrowed freely from this.⁵³ Ostrogorski's theme was the development of the extra-Parliamentary caucus, the permanent party organisation, as an instrument for mobilising the mass vote. Weber, in his accounts in 'Parliament and Government' and in 'Politics as a Vocation', emphasised two particular consequences of this development.⁵⁴ One was the decline in the importance of local notables (*Honoratiors*) who had previously played a major part in the selection of candidates and the organisation of elections, and their replacement by the party boss, the paid election agent or party official, whose professional job was to mobilise the vote whether on an entrepreneurial basis or through a bureaucratic party organisation. 'Every extension of the suffrage... signifies the extension of the strict inter-local bureaucratic organisation of parties, and thereby the increasing dominance of the party bureaucracy and its discipline at the expense of the association of local notables.'⁵⁵ The struggle between the *Honoratiors* and the party official might be longer or shorter, but in the end the latter was bound to prevail.

The other significant consequence was the increasing importance of the political leader who stood at the head of the party machine, at the expense of the individual MP. Where MPs were now dependent upon the support of the machine for their election, both in turn depended on the personality of the party leader and his ability to capture the mass vote in the demagogic content of the election campaign. Where previously MPs may have acted more as individuals, they were now aggregated into a 'following' behind a personality, dependent on his success for their own. 'Nowadays the members of Parliament, with the exception of a few cabinet ministers (and a few eccentrics) are normally nothing better than well-disciplined lobby fodder.'⁵⁶ Weber followed Ostrogorski in regarding contemporary British democracy as a plebiscitary type, with the Prime Minister similar in fact if not in form to the American President. Leaders such as Gladstone and Lloyd George had successfully appealed over the heads of Parliament and party directly to the masses in the country. With such leaders, members of Parliament were 'merely political spoilsmen enrolled in their following.'⁵⁷

Weber's attitude to these developments was different from Ostrogorski's, in that he regarded them as irreversible. Ostrogorski had criticised the dominance of the party organisation and

the plebiscitary leader as a perversion of democracy, which could only be restored by the abolition of permanent party structures with their insidious pressures on individuals. In their place he favoured a system of *ad hoc* coalitions for specific and temporary ends, as being the only way in which the popular will could be adequately represented. Here the MP would be individually responsible to his constituents, and the cabinet minister to the 'popular will' as this expressed itself from time to time.⁵⁸ Weber regarded all such proposals as doomed from the start, in that they failed to recognise the indispensability of party organisations in the era of the mass vote, and the permanence of the change which the latter had brought. 'All attempts to subordinate the representative to the will of the voters have in the long run only one effect: they reinforce the ascendancy of the party organisation over him, since it is the party organisation alone that can mobilise the people.'⁵⁹

Weber thus emphasised the two major roles which had been brought to the fore by the extension of the suffrage, as permanent features of modern politics. On the one hand was the full-time party agent, whether a political entrepreneur like the American boss, or a paid official within a bureaucratic structure as in England and Germany. In each case his power rested on the control of the machinery of vote-getting. Where the *Honoratioren* had wielded influence by virtue of their status in the locality, the party agent was a person totally devoid of status, who typically sought power for its own sake. 'He does not seek social honour: the "professional" is despised in "respectable society"'. He seeks power alone...⁶⁰ On the other hand was the plebiscitary leader, the grand demagogue, the 'dictator of the electoral battlefield', selected by his ability to command a mass vote in the electoral contest.⁶¹ In addition to these two major roles, Weber pointed to others which had become important with the extension of the suffrage, such as the party 'Maecenas' who paid for the machine, or the journalist, 'that most important representative of the demagogic species', whether he worked inside a party or outside it. What was characteristic of all these new roles, except possibly for the Maecenas,⁶² was that recruitment to them did not depend upon birth or even education, which Weber insisted had nothing to do with political skill. The qualities 'selected' by the new circumstances of universal suffrage were those which led to success in mobilising the vote—skills of organisation and propaganda, qualities of mass leadership, the ability to contribute finance to the party machine.

Political democracy, according to Weber, thus did not bring any diminution or diffusion of power, but rather a shift in its location from the local notables and individual MPs to a new set of roles which demanded different qualities and a different pattern of recruitment. The law of the small number still operated as before, only now power was concentrated in the hands of the full-time professionals who operated the machine and the leader who stood at its head. The most succinct expression of the law of the small number at work in mass democracy is Weber's thumbnail sketch of political parties at the end of Part I of *Economy and Society*. The chief elements in party activities, he says, are the following:

- 1 Party leaders and their staffs, who control the operation.
- 2 Active party members, who for the most part merely have the function of acclamation of their leaders, though in certain circumstances they may also act as a check, participate in discussion, voice complaints, submit resolutions.
- 3 The inactive masses of electors, who are merely objects whose votes are sought at election time...
- 4 Contributors to party funds, who usually, though not always, remain behind the scenes.⁶³

Weber's account here sounds more oligarchical than it in fact is, since in these passages quoted, particularly from *Economy and Society* and 'Politics as a Vocation', he is referring exclusively to the formal structures of power.⁶⁴ It needs to be kept in mind throughout that Weber saw the political process as operating within a class context. Thus the advent of universal suffrage not only brought a change in the machinery of politics, but meant giving some acknowledgement to the working class and the issues which concerned them.⁶⁵ In the German context, in particular, it meant striking at one of the roots of Junker power in the class-based Prussian suffrage.⁶⁶ Weber also held that the relationship between leader and following presupposed a basis of class interests. Political leaders were the product not only of the political structure, but also of class. Weber's archetype of a political leader, Bismarck, was not an isolated phenomenon, but 'the last and greatest of the Junkers';⁶⁷ though his outlook may have transcended that of his class, his achievements would have been impossible without its support. As Weber wrote explicitly in 1917, 'Any policy of great consequence [grosse Politik] is always made by small groups of men, but decisive for its success... is the willing support of a sufficiently broad and powerful social class.'⁶⁸

The interests of a class, and its level of political awareness, set limits to what a political leader could achieve. Hence Weber's insistence that, whatever changes were made in the political structure after the war, they would have little effect unless the bourgeoisie developed 'a more self-conscious political spirit'.⁶⁹ Weber's elite emphasis was thus set within, or at least alongside, a class analysis, and was not an alternative to it. The present discussion must therefore be regarded as provisional, until Weber's theory of society has been considered.

Despite this limiting assumption about the social context within which political structures were set, it remained true that political initiatives stemmed from the top, and therefore the character of the leader or leading group was crucial. Hence Weber's emphasis on elite roles, and his presentation of the differences between political structures as differences in the types and qualities 'selected' to predominate within them. If political structures could not be distinguished from one another by being more democratic in any meaningful sense, then all the more significance attached to the character and quality of the elite or oligarchy they threw up. The evaluative implications of this are stated explicitly in a passage in Weber's 1917 article on 'The Meaning of Value Freedom':

Every type of social order, without exception, must, if one wishes to *evaluate* it, be assessed according to *which type of man* it gives the opportunity to rise to a position of superiority through the operation of the various objective and subjective selective factors.⁷⁰

As with the strong Parliamentary system itself, so also the electoral contest in a mass democracy encouraged the rise of men with very different qualities from those 'selected' in the process of bureaucratic administration, and ones much more suited to the political struggle:

Only those characters are fitted for political leadership who have been selected in the political struggle, since all politics is in its essence 'Kampf'. The much abused 'work of the demagogue' provides this training on average better than the administrator's office.⁷¹

The distinctive features of modern political democracy, then, according to Weber, were a strong Parliament, which ensured the selection of men equipped to exercise political responsibility; and

universal suffrage, which ensured that the involvement of the mass in the political process would take place in an orderly fashion, and which at the same time changed the character of elite roles, giving supremacy to the party machine and the individual who stood at its head. This is a theory remarkably similar to that later popularised by Joseph Schumpeter, whose conception of democracy as a technique for producing political leaders continues to enjoy wide currency.⁷² Schumpeter's account clearly owes a good deal to Weber; not least in its thoroughgoing critique of classical democratic theory for attributing to the electorate an 'altogether unrealistic' degree of initiative.⁷³ The crusading zeal with which Schumpeter demolishes the illusions of popular sovereignty matches that of Weber himself, as typically expressed by the latter in correspondence with Robert Michels:

Ah! How much disillusion you still have to endure! Concepts such as 'the will of the people', the true will of the people, have long since lost any meaning for me; they are fictions.⁷⁴

In the case of Weber and Schumpeter alike, the apparently tough realism with which they assert the inevitability of oligarchy conceals a prescriptive premise. Their view that initiatives in politics stem from a few at the top is coloured by their fear of what will happen if they do not. The law of the small number, the fictional character of the popular will, has to be asserted as the truth, so that it should become if possible more firmly established.

Underlying this ambiguous position can be discerned the ambivalent attitude towards the 'mass' that is typical of most elite theorists. On the one hand the mass is seen as a passive object, incapable of any independent action and initiative, easily led by the nose. On the other hand it is a disturbing phenomenon, potentially dangerous, needing to be kept subject to 'order'. These two faces of the mass are given extreme expression in the influential work by Gustav le Bon on the crowd, where the crowd is at once 'a servile flock that is incapable of ever doing without a master' and also possessed of 'savage and destructive instincts left dormant by previous ages'.⁷⁵ This double image of the mass produced in the elite theorists the simultaneous assertion of two mutually inconsistent principles: on the one hand a law, 'oligarchy is inevitable'; on the other a principle, 'a few heads are sounder'.⁷⁶

Both propositions are to be found in Weber's political writings, though not in so sharp a form. Thus he writes, as in the passage quoted above,⁷⁷ that there is no question of the 'politically passive mass' throwing up a leader of itself, even in the most democratic

system. They can only wait to be won by a leader, and it is he who controls the initiative. Then a few pages later we learn that the mass as such 'thinks only of the morrow'; it is always subject to emotional and irrational influences. Realistic and responsible policies require that matters should be left in the hands of a few:

A cool and clear head—and successful politics, no less successful democratic politics, can only be made with the head—is more likely to prevail... the smaller the number of those taking part in the deliberations.⁷⁸

This ambivalence between a descriptive and a prescriptive account of the 'mass' finds its parallel in Weber's account of individual leadership. The importance of the individual leader to Weber lay not only in what he could achieve historically, in his empirical exploits, but also in the intrinsic value which lay in individual as opposed to collective action. This is shown clearly by a passage in Weber's account of the 1905 revolution in Russia, which he contrasted with previous European revolutions for its lack of 'great leaders'. Everything, he wrote, was simply a 'collective product'. This was in part explained by the character of modern revolution and the tactics necessary to fight a police state. So much effort had to be devoted to tactics that 'it was difficult for "great leading personalities" to play any role. Against vermin it is impossible for "great" deeds to be accomplished.'⁷⁹ It is clear that it is the quality of the revolution that Weber is questioning here, not the extent of its possible consequences. Only an individual could perform 'great' deeds, not a collective. The 'mass' for Weber, as an undifferentiated collective, had a largely negative significance. While being an inescapable feature of modern politics, its only useful role lay in providing an ordered response to a leader's initiative.

What is distinctive about this account of democracy, like that of Schumpeter subsequently, is that it makes no reference to democratic values, much less regards them as worth striving for.⁸⁰ A strong Parliamentary system was justified because it provided a training ground for leadership; the advantage of mass democracy lay in the opportunities it provided for the rise of outstanding individuals. However, if Weber gave little room in his theory to democratic values, what of liberal ones? Schumpeter certainly regarded his own conception of democracy as a means to preserving political liberties. How far Weber did so is a matter of some debate, and the chapter will conclude with an examination of this question.

PARLIAMENT AS A PROTECTOR OF LIBERTY

According to Wolfgang Mommsen, the *only* functions assigned to Parliament in Weber's theory were those of developing a political leadership and scrutinising the administration:

The purpose of parliamentary democracy in Weber's conception reduced itself essentially to two functions: the selection of politicians with the capacity for leadership and the control of... the administrative apparatus.⁸¹

In Mommsen's view, Weber's account of modern democracy involved the abandonment of the ideas of liberal constitutionalism, and this for a number of reasons.⁸² One was his rejection of natural law theory, which had previously provided the philosophical basis for human rights, as being no longer valid or acceptable to modern man. A second reason lay in the rise of the organised party machine, which diminished the significance of Parliament as a forum for the free expression of individual opinion. Such developments 'destroyed the ideological basis... of liberal constitutionalism'.⁸³ Here Mommsen overstates his case, as well as ignoring the distinction in Weber between individualism and civil or constitutional rights. Because deputies were organised into a party following, it did not follow that Parliament could no longer be an effective guarantor of political liberties. Because civil rights were no longer underpinned by natural law beliefs, it did not follow that they could not be protected by institutional structures which enjoyed a backing of social support. Mommsen writes almost as if he himself believed that there could be no constitutional liberalism except on a natural law basis.⁸⁴

In fact, there is ample evidence that, besides its other functions, Weber also regarded a strong Parliament as a protector of civil rights and liberties, and valued it for this reason. This is most clearly emphasised in his writings on the 1905 Russian revolution, in which he linked the possible attainment of civil rights and Parliamentary government together. In the event, as he showed, the various freedoms announced in the October manifesto—freedoms of expression, of conscience, of association, of assembly, of the person—remained only token, and could only continue to be so in the absence of an effective Parliament. The Duma was itself a token assembly, lacking the power to subject the administration to scrutiny, and because of this the system of administrative arbitrariness was able to proceed unchecked. Even the deputies

themselves enjoyed a degree of immunity far inferior to normal European practice. A strong Parliament and the guarantee of civil rights belonged together.⁸⁵

Weber made the same point explicitly in his wartime articles on 'Parliament and Government', significantly enough in the context of his discussion of the plebiscitary leader. The position of Lloyd George, he argued, though in theory dependent on Parliament, in practice had a plebiscitary basis: it owed its support to the masses in the country and the army at the front. Yet this did not make the existence of Parliament valueless. In face of the 'Caesarist leader who enjoyed the confidence of the masses' Parliament provided a check on his power, a guarantee of civil rights and a peaceful means of removing him when he lost popular confidence.⁸⁶ As Weber frequently observed, the Parliamentary and plebiscitary principles stood in some tension to one another. While it was possible for a plebiscitary leader to emerge within a Parliamentary system, at the same time the context of Parliamentary responsibility was important in keeping his powers in check. Thus, far from the advent of the party machine marking the end of constitutional liberalism, it made more necessary the function of a strong Parliament in protecting individual liberties in face of power of the plebiscitary leader; and this remained an important feature of Weber's theory at least until the postwar period.

As was pointed out in Chapter 2, a characteristic of Weber's political standpoint was his commitment to the values of strong leadership and political liberty at the same time. The significance of his theory of Parliament was that it was an attempt to hold them together, and combine both functions in the same institution. The fact that he did not devote much space to the liberal dimension of Parliament in his wartime writings does not mean that it was not important to him. As he wrote earlier in the same series of articles, it was a gross illusion to imagine that life would be at all worth living 'without the achievements bequeathed by the age of the "rights of man"'.⁸⁷ Because such rights were taken for granted did not make them any the less significant. Though Mommsen is right to insist that, in contrast with the liberal tradition, the weight of emphasis in Weber's writings on Germany is on the function of Parliament as a selector of leaders, he is mistaken to overlook its function as a protector of liberties as he does. Weber's conception of Parliament included both. This makes all the more significant the change of view which led him to advocate downgrading the position of Parliament in the postwar constitution.⁸⁸

One writer who recognises the liberal features in Weber's political theory is Gustav Schmidt in his book *Deutscher Historismus und der Übergang zur parlamentarischen Demokratie*.⁸⁹ Schmidt is representative of the opposite tendency to Mommsen, of those who claim to find a much more liberal, even democratic, element in Weber's work. The aim of his book is to show how a number of German thinkers, contemporary with Weber, attempted to adapt the British theory of Parliamentary government to the uniqueness of the German historical tradition. According to Schmidt, a central feature of English constitutional theory, then as now, was that the—in theory—limitless power of the government was in practice restricted by the norms or 'operative ideals' of society, which constituted its real source of legitimacy. This concept of society, he argues, embodying a particular 'moral standard', was taken over by Weber to provide a missing element in his political theory: an account of the source of the political leader's legitimacy. In contrast to the 'legality' involved in bureaucratic authority, the *legitimacy* of the political leader lay for Weber in his conformity to the 'moral standard' or 'operative ideals' of society. Where the former element was implicit in the German historical tradition, the latter derived from the constitutional theory of Britain.⁹⁰

Schmidt's interpretation is mistaken in this respect, that he makes Weber out, in his theory of legitimacy, to be engaged in a philosophical rather than a sociological enterprise. Weber was nowhere concerned to give the kind of philosophical account of legitimacy that Schmidt portrays, and that is characteristic of the English sources that he cites (notably Lindsay). Weber certainly wished to prescribe certain types of institution and political leadership as preferable to others, but he nowhere suggested that such institutions or leaders could only be *legitimate* if they accorded with a particular constitutional principle. This was wholly foreign to his conviction that constitutional principles were simply means, and had no value in themselves.

Nevertheless, Schmidt does identify an important element in Weber's political theory, and that is its dependence on a concept of society, though this should be seen more in sociological than philosophical terms. Weber's political theory was never merely institutional. While looking to Parliament for the institutional protection of liberties, he did not imagine that it could perform this function on its own, any more than it could guarantee political leadership, without a strong basis in society. This was worked out most fully in his articles on Russia, which went beyond an examina-

tion of the particular proposals for a liberal constitutional system to consider what basis of social support existed for Parliamentary government in the major classes and their conditions of life. In respect of German politics Weber was equally explicit that, without a politically self-confident bourgeoisie, the freest institutions would be 'a mere shadow'.⁹¹ His conception of Parliament thus rested on a theory of society. The relationship was, however, sociological rather than philosophical. That is to say, Weber was more concerned with the question: what kind of social support is necessary to make political institutions effective? than the question: what kind of support is necessary to make them legitimate? Weber's theory of society and its relation to politics forms the main subject of Chapters 6 to 8. Before turning to this, however, there is one further aspect of his political theory to be considered: his account of the nation and his justification for nationalism as a principle. This will form the subject of the following chapter.

REFERENCES

- 1 GPS, pp 533-4; GM, pp 115-6.
- 2 D Lindenthal, op cit, pp 261-3, 393-9.
- 3 GPS, pp 76-8.
- 4 GPS, 1st edn, pp 455-7.
- 5 *ibid.*, pp 457-8.
- 6 Two works on British government which were widely read in this period were Sidney Low, *Die Regierung Englands*, and A L Lowell, *Die englische Verfassung*, translated in 1908 and 1913 respectively.
- 7 Especially GPS, pp 327-57.
- 8 GPS, p 327.
- 9 GPS, pp 327-8.
- 10 *ibid.*
- 11 GPS, pp 213, 459.
- 12 GPS, pp 329, 354-5.
- 13 GPS, p 336.
- 14 GPS, p 343.
- 15 GPS, pp 353-4. In turn their oppositional attitude itself formed an obstacle to the introduction of Parliamentary government, *ibid.* See Chapter 6.
- 16 GPS, pp 336-7.
- 17 GPS, pp 334, 379.
- 18 GPS, pp 213, 348.
- 19 GPS, pp 331, 342, 391.
- 20 GPS, p 343.
- 21 GPS, pp 333-4.
- 22 GPS, p 428.
- 23 Designed by Bismarck and sustained by the power interests of the bureaucracy. See the articles, 'Bismarcks Erbe in der Reichsverfassung' and 'Die Erbschaft Bismarcks', GPS, pp 229-32, 299-308. For bureaucratic power interests, see GPS, *passim*.
- 24 GPS, p 276.
- 25 GPS, p 277. Weber also justifies a Parliamentary system here against government by referendum on the grounds that it allows for the 'relatively best' solution by means of compromise.
- 26 GPS, pp 214, 341-3, 353, 428.
- 27 GPS, p 343.
- 28 GPS, pp 352-3.
- 29 GPS, pp 330-1, 350, 412, 423, 426. See also the article 'Die Abänderung des Artikel 9 der Reichsverfassung', GPS, 3rd edn, pp 222-5.
- 30 GPS, pp 371-2, 317.
- 31 GPS, p 412.
- 32 GPS, 1st edn, p 470.
- 33 GPS, pp 197, 227, 336, 344, 368, etc.
- 34 The best account of the elite thesis is in G B Parry, *Political Elites* (London, 1969).
- 35 GPS, p 392.
- 36 GPS, p 279; WG, p 567; ES, p 983.
- 37 GPS, pp 292, 381.
- 38 GPS, p 278.
- 39 GPS, pp 274, 293.
- 40 GPS, p 381; cf 287, 423.
- 41 For a qualification of this, see page 109.
- 42 In a similar way he supported the trade unions in wartime as 'the only elements of mass discipline', GPS, p 293.
- 43 GPS, p 254.
- 44 GPS, p 256.
- 45 GPS, pp 235-41.
- 46 *cf* GPS, p 394.
- 47 GPS, p 336.
- 48 *e.g.* WG, p 548; ES, p 952.
- 49 GPS, p 389.
- 50 WG, p 548; ES, p 952.
- 51 GASS, pp 494-5.
- 52 WG, p 568; ES, p 985.
- 53 M Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties* (London, 1902).
- 54 GPS, pp 371-6, 521-5; GM, pp 101-7.
- 55 WG, p 548; ES, p 952.
- 56 GPS, p 524.
- 57 *ibid.*
- 58 M Ostrogorski, op. cit.
- 59 WG, p 666.
- 60 GPS, p 527.
- 61 GPS, p 523. Weber was not alone in using the terms 'dictator' and 'Caesar' of the British prime minister; such terms were a commonplace of contemporary analysis. S Low, op cit, pp 150-1. F Tönnies, *Der englische Staat und der deutsche Staat* (Berlin, 1917), pp 50ff.
- 62 Herr A Thyssen, the Maecenas of the Catholic Centre party, claimed 'the social status of an archbishop'. GPS, pp 374-5.
- 63 WG, p 167; ES, p 285.
- 64 It is with this formal political dimension that the present chapter is concerned.