V

As the British case illustrates, modern parliamentary democracy presupposes cooperation and conflict of well-integrated parties that practice a certain measure of inner-party democracy and offer clear-cut alternatives. In a country such as West Germany the functioning of the constitutional system is impeded because German parties are deficient in both those respects.

After the decline of the radical right-wing and left-wing parties, the three (or four) established official parties are now holding an oligopolistic position - they form a kind of cartel. Their antagonisms are reduced to patronage struggles and to less momentous political issues (such as social policy, taxation problems, and educational affairs). Alternatives to foreign policy (including questions of re-unification) as well as a possible alternative to the socio-economic system are repressed from consciousness.

As patronage parties the German parties attempt to take advantage of the state in behalf of themselves and their followers - at the same time, the parties are becoming objects of the state. They grow into "state parties", i.e. into agencies of power and domination. The institutionalization and "constitutionalization" of the parties in Germany postulated in Art. 21 of the Bonn Basic Law reminds one ever more of the close connection of government and parties typical of the United States. In contrast to America, however, the German parties are becoming ever more autocratic, centralistic, and monolithic in character. The party bureaucracy is the chief agent in this process, also acting as the chief protagonist of the accomodation mentioned before. Its influence is growing within all parties, particularly within the Social Democratic Party, because this party lacks the balancing influence of independent democratic and plutocratic forces. As the inner-party life atrophies, the parties can no longer appreciably increase their membership. Simultaneous with this adjustment of the parties to the status quo and the elimination of critical social attitudes and ideologies, a general de-politization of the voter can be observed (this inspite of the high figures of electoral participation).

According to the Basic Law of 1949, West Germany is a democratic and social federal state. If it is true, as Professor Hans Reif once stated, that the history of democracy is reflected in the history of parliaments, then Dolf Sternberger is right in describing the Federal Diet as a parliament altogether too silent. According to him the chancellor's conception of authority and the social democratic strategy of maintaining eligibility as a coalition partner contributed to a silencing or at least a crippling of the parliament. Not only is it unable to act, it even discourages public discussion by failing to furnish a platform of significant debatable issues. Indeed, it is not without reason that in Germany one has