

SUMMARY

Parties, Parapolitical Systems and Political Systems: Some Comments on the Relevance and Objects of Party Research

by Dag Anckar

The aim of the article is to discuss some aspects of the general theme »Party and System». System is defined as a complex of interactions and three categories for party research are put forward, namely »party as system», »party system» and »party in system». The discussion focuses on the relation between party as system and party in system — the author finds the level of party system questionable and discusses briefly the analytical and conceptual difficulties involved in this level.

David Eastons famous definition of politics and the eastonian distinction between political and parapolitical systems are used as starting points for a theoretical discussion, and a leading idea is that interactions can be political and parapolitical at the same time, the classification depending on different conceptions of society. As a consequence, party activities should not *a priori* be classified as political or parapolitical. Further, party research should preferably concentrate on the »political part» of parties, while the »parapolitical part» should represent an intermediate interest, which is given attention only so far as it tells something about politics — the thesis that one should study parties in order to gain knowledge about politics, not about parties, is emphasized. In this context a model with two systemic circuits is given, and the aim of the model is to illustrate relevant connections between the parapolitical and the political sphere.

Party studies dealing with party as system are criticized in this respect. Of course, there are many studies dealing with relations between e.g. organizational features and voting results, but on the whole party research has taken a too limited and isolated view of the internal party arena.

The author illustrates his above-mentioned thesis by suggesting four research projects. These projects are derived from an eastonian conception of politics as a systemic process, containing four basic relations, namely input-conversion, conversion-output, output-outcomes and outcomes-input. These relations can be summarized in categories of input-oriented party research and out-put-oriented party research, and the two head categories can be taken down in subcategories in terms of causes and effects. With these distinctions as a general frame of reference the author stresses the importance of studying (1) the impact of party communication on wants, i.e. peoples conceptions of environmental conditions; (2) voting rationality, i.e. the question to what degree voting decisions can be explained by policy preferences; (3) party strategies as explanatory factors when studying output; and (4) the role of parties in administration, especially administrative positions as party resources. Each project is discussed in broad terms and some general comments on their systemic relevance are given.