THE *GERMAN POLITICS* LECTURE 2008

Deparliamentarisation: How Severely is the German Bundestag Affected?

SUZANNE S. SCHÜTTEMEYER

Parliaments have lost their functions. This complaint is almost as old as the institution itself. 100 years ago it was stated that the Golden Age of parliamentarism was over. The classic liberal idea of representation – the notion that independent deputies generate the common good by benevolent and enlightened deliberation in plenary debates – this idea, so the criticism claimed, was not enacted any more. Foes – but also friends – of the institution came to the conclusion that parliamentary democracy was going downhill. James Bryce, for instance, chose the title *The Decline of Legislatures* for his renowned book published in 1921.

The criticism in those decades was a mixture of normative conceptions emerging from the early practice of parliaments in constitutionalism, scepticism against parties and a lack of understanding what parliamentary decision-making requires. Last but not least there was much disenchantment with parliaments that did not fulfil the expectations. After half a century of liberal-democratic parliamentarism in England and elsewhere the deficits were listed:

- declining quality of deputies;
- increasing corruption;
- growing influence of parties;
- too little responsiveness;
- lack of leadership;
- too little public resonance;
- rapid decline of reputation.

These criticisms from the 1920s seem so familiar to us they could have been written today. Yet despite this diagnosis of severe shortcomings, parliamentarism was reintroduced quite naturally after the collapse of the regimes of terror and totalitarianism in Western Europe after World War II. Equally naturally, the former satellite states of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe returned immediately to free elections for parliaments as the key elements of democratic constitutional states and pluralist societies after 1990. And although parliaments have contributed immensely, for instance in Western Europe over the last 60 years, to create internal and external peace they are again facing the assertion of decline in the early years of the twenty-first century. Today it comes under the rubric of

post-parliamentarism, a term referring primarily to the consequences of supra- and international developments, or under deparliamentarisation which focuses rather on internal aspects.

These two catchwords claim that parliaments – based on territorial representation – are no longer able to take the decisions necessary for highly complex societies. Parliaments could neither represent the large variety of differentiated interests nor would they command sufficient expertise and specialisation to regulate ever more complicated subjects. The specific conditions of globalisation and European integration are often believed to have added further to this negative balance sheet of parliamentarism and to impair its position in the political system.

Moreover, some critics argue, parliaments would be rivalled or even superseded by expert commissions, neo-corporatist structures and policy networks. In these, private and semi-private actors would represent specialised interests much more competently, would deal objectively with complex issues in a problem-oriented way, negotiate and find solutions in an effective manner. In this scenario private and semi-private actors work hand in hand with the government which – as a small unit and equipped with the expertise of its ministerial bureaucracy – has long reached an overwhelming superiority over the parliament. This type of deparliamentarisation, so the argument goes, would be further enhanced by the way politics is communicated through the media, especially by tendencies of personalisation of politics.

Whereas the swan-song of the early twentieth century faded away without destroying the belief in the fundamental value of democratic parliamentarism, it seems that this time the combination of threatening factors is too strong to save parliaments from becoming marginalised. Let me examine the most salient points of this development with regard to the German Bundestag.

SELF-DEPRIVATION OF THE GERMAN BUNDESTAG?

In recent years Hans-Jürgen Papier, President of the Federal Constitutional Court (BVerfG) of Germany, made himself heard as one of the fiercest critics of politics and institutions in the country. He widely publicised his diagnosis that the Bundestag is depriving itself of its powers. And he does not stand alone in this position: renowned constitutional lawyers, journalists – and not only from tabloids, public opinion in general and certainly many ordinary citizens share his views.

The core argument is this: the government negotiates directly with interest groups, then publicly announces a certain piece of legislation or makes what sounds like binding promises without even asking the Bundestag at all. The executive cooperates in policy networks, i.e. the chancellor and his ministers together with the ministerial bureaucracy seek 'consensus' with interest groups, unions and associations. They aim at a solution which aligns the political goals of the government with the positions of the economic and social interests involved. On one hand, so the argument goes, this would make decisions more acceptable and would facilitate their implementation. On the other hand, the Bundestag is reduced to rubberstamping the results of such negotiations. Corrections and amendments would no longer be possible, as the result of this kind of decision-making is a package deal which means as a rule that changing details could endanger the whole compromise.

A complete rejection, Papier and others argue further, is not possible, for the majority in the Bundestag cannot say no altogether as this would embarrass its own government and lead to a negative public image. Thus, parliament's 'yes' is dictated and it is no longer part of the real decision-making process. Instead of the Bundestag, selected partners act alongside the government, and these partners are obviously not included in the democratic context of legitimation and responsibility. Examples are the Alliance for Jobs (Bündnis für Arbeit) between the government, the employers' associations and labour unions to overcome unemployment or the so-called 'Atomkonsens', the consensus talks on the phasing out of nuclear power plants conducted between the government and the atomic energy suppliers during the red–green coalition before 2005.

Another much debated phenomenon is the allegedly increased role of expert commissions in public policy-making. It is claimed that they are not used – at least not primarily – for gaining information but that the government tries to build consensus and broaden political legitimacy through such commissions by way of what is presumed a less 'political' and more 'objective' approach to problems. The German Ethics Council (called Nationaler Ethikrat between 2001 and 2007), and especially the Hartz (2001–02), Rürup (2002–03), the Süssmuth (2000–01) and Weizsäcker (1999–2000) Commissions are often presented as evidence to support this claim (the commissions are named after their chairpersons; their proper titles were: 'Modern Services for the Job Market', 'Sustainable Financing of Social Security Systems', 'Migration', 'Common Security and the Future of Germany's Armed Forces').

The essence of this criticism is that the decisions are shifted from parliament to highly selective circles of interest group representatives and experts with whom the executive negotiates political solutions. Formally, the final decisions remain with the Bundestag; thus its legal, constitutional status remains intact. But in fact, the true substance of these decisions is determined elsewhere. Without doubt, the highest ranking guardian of the German constitution, the chief judge of the BVerfG Papier, is a serious witness of current political developments. However, there are strong grounds for contradiction.

Contrary to what has become conventional wisdom and found its way into those nice catchy words of 'Kommissionitis' and 'Räterepublik', studies of expert commissions have shown that the use of external policy advice has not grown over the last ten years. Gerhard Schröder's government did not install more commissions than his predecessors. Neither did Angela Merkel. What has grown is the public's interest in these bodies – or rather: the media's. But that is not our topic today. Concerning deparliamentarisation the following must be said.

(1) It is not true that the results of these expert commissions and interest group negotiations are simply ratified by the Bundestag. Take the recommendations the Hartz Commission submitted in 2002, which were presented with masterly public stage management by Chancellor Schröder: holding the report – 343 pages – in his hands, facing 600 invited guests in the French cathedral on Berlin's Gendarmenmarkt, he promised that these recommendations would be implemented 1:1, in other words that the contents of the report would be turned into legislation with no alterations. This '1:1 sentence' soon became a caricature for political boastfulness. Immediately afterwards, the Chancellor faced open resistance from his own parliamentary party:

a good number of Social Democratic MPs threatened to initiate a members' plebiscite in the party organisation on Agenda 2010 (the acronym adopted for the reform of the job market and social policies). Obviously, the Green Party, Schröder's coalition partner, also had several reservations and different ideas which were not kept secret, not to speak of the opposition in the Bundestag – at least the Christian Democrats who held the majority in the Bundesrat, the second chamber, which would have to give its assent to key issues of the reform plans. Thus, parliament was strongly involved in turning the commission's report into legislation, not only in the sense of staging – ultimately ineffective – public debates by the opposition, but also with regard to influential pressure on the side of the parliamentary parties of the governmental majority.

The same story can be told for the Süssmuth Commission. It had been a tactical move by Chancellor Schröder to choose the Christian Democrat Rita Süssmuth, former minister in cabinets of his predecessor Helmut Kohl and highly regarded Speaker of the Bundestag for ten years, to chair that commission dealing with the difficult and highly sensitive immigration policies of the country. Schröder's hope that the nomination of a prominent Christian Democrat would help to gain broad acceptance for the expected results failed to materialise. The Christian Democratic opposition in the Bundestag did not at all refrain from negative comments. And neither did the majority; both coalition parties introduced their own models and amendments.

This list could easily be continued. Indeed, it is not the Bundestag and its parliamentary parties that have suffered deprivation through the use of commissions and top-level summits but rather the ministerial bureaucracy. Civil servants were partly substituted by external expertise and consultancy. They lost their influence as policy-makers as basic choices of alternatives and details of envisaged regulations were not in their hands any longer.

(2) That parliament is far from being marginalised by experts or interest group representatives becomes particularly clear when conflict occurs inside these bodies and especially if this becomes publicly known or is even used as a tactical instrument. Then it is amply proven that negotiations and consensus talks or simply 'scientific objectivity' are not sufficient to create democratic legitimacy.

I cannot find evidence to support the view – expressed, for instance, by Fritz Scharpf and former Federal Constitutional Court Judge Dieter Grimm – that controversial discussions about political goals, the core of democratic politics, are lost in a myth of objective expertise. What I see is almost the direct opposite: there are numerous controversies going on between Members of the Bundestag – between those of the majority and those in the opposition, between those inside the governing coalition, and between the different opposition parties. What they do not do, however, is carry out these struggles solely on the floor of the Bundestag. But it seems that the protagonists of deparliamentarisation refer to this – the plenary chamber and debate of the Bundestag – when arguing empirically as well as normatively. This reveals the structural core of this whole debate: those criticising that the 'substantial political process' and the 'real' decisions do not take place 'in parliament and in the framework of parliamentary procedures' misunderstand the essence of modern parliamentarism and fail to recognise the logic of parliamentary government.

Among political scientists, especially scholars of parliamentarism, this is like 'carrying coal to Newcastle'; but in large parts of the public and also among constitutional law professors in Germany there is a deep-rooted misperception, which is reproduced over and over again by the media when presenting politics, especially on television: the notion of the so-called old dualism, i.e. the government on the one side and parliament as a whole on the other, with deputies as independent individuals, only interested in the issues at hand and bound by no other interest than the common good and their conscience. Political scientists know that this neither pictures the reality of parliamentary government nor captures the appropriate normative concepts.

In German political science, Winfried Steffani has created the term 'Regierungsmehrheit' – governmental majority – indicating the unit of the majority in parliament plus its government. Together with the opposition on the other side this makes up the 'new dualism' of parliamentary government. We all know that it is the first and foremost function of the majority in parliament to create a government and keep it in office. This majority is tied together by common policy goals and, in the case of a one-party government, a common party ideology. No matter whether a government consists of one party or a coalition of several parties: the ultimate aim is to stay in office, now and in the next elections. Given the widespread mistrust in politics and politicians it needs to be emphasised that together with self-interest the underlying force in the majority is the conviction that their political answers to given problems are better than the opposition's, or, in the words of political science, their motives are of the policy-seeking as well as the office-seeking type.

The key to success is 'Geschlossenheit', cohesion. Only if the voters get the impression that the incumbent majority is capable of efficient problem-solving will they confirm it in the next elections. Frequent struggles within a party or among coalition partners are no sign for such 'Handlungsfähigkeit'. Only if the majority can maintain sufficient cohesion will it fulfil the core function of parliament to guarantee efficient government. Moreover, 'to speak with one voice', in other words clear leadership on issue positions, is essential for electoral success. This is true for majority and opposition alike.

The consequence of this fundamental logic of parliamentary government is that constant endeavours must be made to produce and keep up this cohesion. The government cannot take backbench support for granted. Communication, consultation and control mechanisms are needed between the cabinet and the parliamentary parties on the government side. And although the government takes the lead, their relationship is one of mutual influence and not a one-way road. Often the process that leads to cohesion is lengthy and complicated, entailing repeated efforts to convince each other, integrate deviating opinions and hammer out compromises. But in order to create the public impression of efficiency and competence this has to happen behind the closed doors of the cabinet room and the meeting rooms of parliamentary parties, and only if unity over issues and decisions is reached will the leading figures of the cabinet and the parliamentary parties address the public. If internal disagreement cannot be settled, becomes known or is even leaked to the media deliberately, it is a clear sign of failing mechanisms of cohesion-building.

Maintaining cohesion has a second precondition: avoiding hierarchy. If the government tries to impose a position on its parliamentary parties immediate resistance is

the consequence; they want to be heard and if this is not respected then acts of self-assertion occur, potentially harming the majority's public image. Even worse, if formal hierarchical measures are applied, they may indicate that the mechanisms of political consultation and coordination *inside* the governmental majority have failed. Tabling a confidence motion, for example, is generally not a sign of the Chancellor's strength but a last resort and an indication of an incumbent's weakness.

In sum, the relationship between the majority and its government is much more complex than conventional wisdom has it. The deputies in the parliamentary majority are not a stupid herd of sheep, useful for electing the chancellor once and subsequently raising their hands whenever they are told to do so by their whips and 'superiors' in the cabinet. If for no other reason, they keep a watchful eye on 'their' government's performance as their own future depends on it.

Meanwhile we know quite a lot from empirical research about the relationships inside the governmental majority:

- the internal working structure of the parliamentary party is a framework in which constant coordination takes place between the government and the MPs, sounding out what is politically possible;
- bodies of coordination between the coalition partners in the Bundestag always include leaders and policy experts of the parliamentary parties;
- MPs maintain frequent contacts with civil servants. The policy experts of the majority parties in the Bundestag are often involved in executive networks tasked with the preparation of bills; so called Ressortbruderschaften, 'sectoral fraternities', between ministries, their departments and specialised MPs are a well-known phenomenon in the history of the German Bundestag;
- networks of the government and organised interests often include the respective policy speakers of the majority;
- the relationship between leadership and backbenchers in the majority parties is not top-down but much more complex in its two-way channels of influence.

Thus, we can conclude at this point, it is correct that the real processes of decision-making do not take place in the Bundestag and in the framework of parliamentary procedures – if one understands the Bundestag as a whole institution vis-à-vis the government and parliamentary procedures as the legally prescribed workings in com-mittees and on the floor of the House. But, as we have seen, this is an inappropriate perspective. The core feature of parliamentarism is the existence of a closely linked unit of parliamentary majority and government. This government is installed by the majority to prepare legislative decisions, and also pre-structure them to a large extent. In this function of the government Members of the Bundestag are involved in many ways – in institutionalised structures and procedures in the parliamentary parties and the coalition as well as in informal patterns of participation. Considering these empirical findings and taking them into account when creating a realistic notion of parliamentarism, the hypothesis of deparliamentarisation resulting from government by negotiation with organised interest and experts cannot be upheld.

Refuting this thesis is not equivalent to claiming a balance between parliament and government. The latter's superiority cannot be denied and shall not be denied. The

government commands the ministerial bureaucracy with its specialists, it selects the members of the commissions, it is equipped with the chancellor's authority and visibility in public. The crucial point in our context is: this superiority is not a hypertrophic degeneration but is exactly what the government is there for as we can read already in Bagehot's lucid observations on *The English Constitution* published in 1867. This dominance is, however, not unconditional: the continuous acceptance of the government's superiority rests on its capacity to represent successfully, i.e. anticipate the political will of its majority and assess correctly what can be done with its parliamentary parties and what not.

Numerous examples exist to support this. In 1992, the FDP leadership in the cabinet and parliamentary party selected Irmgard Adam-Schwätzer to succeed Hans-Dietrich Genscher as foreign minister and proposed her to Helmut Kohl as Federal Chancellor when an outcry occurred virtually the next morning in the rank and file of the parliamentary party of the FDP who preferred Klaus Kinkel. Kinkel became foreign minister – a slap in the face of the leadership, a clear sign of misreading the will of the parliamentary party and of deficits in the communication. Policy examples galore can be given: the comprehensive health reform (2006), deputies' salaries (2008), tax reforms (2003) – these and many more issues showed how crucial it is for successful policy-making that the internal mechanisms of matching each other's positions and finding common solutions are functioning well. At times of Grand Coalitions, i.e. coalitions between the CDU/CSU and the SPD (1966–69 and 2005–), this becomes even more visible as the cost of deviating from one's own group is lower given the large majority that the government has in the House. But also in 'ordinary' coalitions there is hardly any important legislative proposal by the government that is not met with objections by single deputies or groups inside the parliamentary parties. This mutual dependency between the parliamentary majority and its government only functions and the government's superiority does not become totally overwhelming, if the Members of Parliament are taken seriously by the executive.

This brings us to a second major aspect of the deparliamentarisation thesis: the assertion that the Members of the Bundestag are not able to represent the wide variety of interests and do not have sufficient knowledge to find policy solutions. The data and facts available for the Bundestag speak a different language; some short remarks should suffice here.

(1) Persons entering the Bundestag have had better and better educational backgrounds: The percentage of university graduates among deputies rose from 45 in the first to almost 80 in the current Bundestag.

(2) It is not true that the German federal parliament is a body composed of civil servants with law degrees and teachers. Comprehensive longitudinal data on the socio-demographic composition of the Bundestag show that a wide variety of professional backgrounds and experiences exists.

(3) Clear patterns of professionalisation have developed in the German parliament. Again only few points suffice to illustrate this picture here. Careers in the parliamentary parties almost always require policy specialisation. The career ladder for newcomers has a number of steps: working groups (permanent bodies specialising in policy areas) in the parliamentary party, standing committees of the Bundestag,

rapporteur in those committees, speaker of the parliamentary party in a policy field, chairman of a working group, committee chairman, member of the board and at last the executive committee of the parliamentary party. This is the framework which enables the individual deputy to learn and to prove to his or her peers in the parliamentary party that he or she is a useful and reliable asset in the nitty-gritty of everyday legislative work, that he or she is a team player and has leadership qualities. Not all of these steps need to be taken, and not necessarily in the same sequence, but by and large they constitute the environment in which the deputies can prove themselves over the years for high positions in the executive.

For the Bundestag it has been shown that a high degree of specialisation and division of labour exists; indeed the German parliament and its parliamentary parties run the risk of 'over-bureaucratisation'. Meanwhile the two big parliamentary parties (and the smaller ones to a lesser extent) are departmentalised: the working groups provide the framework within which Members of the Bundestag become specialists and decide the bulk of policy issues arising over bills on behalf of their party; the respective group of deputies is 'in charge' of 'its' policy area. Only if issues become highly politicised and controversial, will the executive committee of the parliamentary party take the lead. This division of labour functions under two preconditions. (1) Those 'in charge' must present convincing work on bills to their colleagues in the parliamentary party; in case of failure they are threatened with criticism, protest or even de-selection. (2) The group in charge is not always the same; it changes from issue to issue so that no expert oligarchy dominates 'ordinary' deputies. Rather most Members are experts in one or more policy areas, relying on their parliamentary co-partisans specialising in other policy areas for cues in their respective jurisdictions. Thus, the parliamentary party creates a complex web of mutual dependency. This mutuality enables the individual deputy to decide responsibly – in some issues as the expert which he must become if he wants to exert influence, and which he can only become because he can rely on his party colleagues in other fields.

As to the parliamentary expertise it must be added that the Bundestag is an extremely well equipped parliament. Its members have access to considerable funds to hire personal assistance; the two major parliamentary parties, CDU/CSU and SPD, employ around 300 members of staff; a well equipped bureaucracy with a professional research service assists the Bundestag as a whole. Hearings are standard procedure in the committees and individual networks with interest groups exist in considerable numbers.

In sum, research has attested that the Bundestag is a hard-working parliament, its members are efficiency oriented; 'doing a good job' is their primary goal, as surveys among deputies have shown. Deparliamentarisation as a consequence of inadequately trained or equipped deputies and thus the necessity of 'post-parliamentary' structures – this does not apply to the German Bundestag, at least with regard to policy on the national level.

DEPARLIAMENTARISATION ON THE SUPRANATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

In the course of a growing European integration through the Treaties of Maastricht (1993), Amsterdam (1997) and Nizza (2000) more and more policies were shifted to

the European level, so that meanwhile, for instance, around 75 per cent of all agricultural and 80 per cent of economic regulations originate in Brussels. However, we have just been made aware by more sophisticated research that the so called 80 per cent myth (attributed to the former President of the EU Commission, Jacques Delors) is not true. Taking all policy fields together, overall 40 per cent of all legislation in the German Bundestag has a 'European impulse'.

In everyday parliamentary practice, a stream of approximately 2,000 EU documents with 10–15,000 accompanying papers per election period lead to a certain amount of overload. Moreover tight deadlines leave little scope for independent deliberation and decision-making by the Bundestag on what are mostly directives, which usually provide for limited discretion in national legislation, anyway. What is left for parliament are attempts to gain some influence on the ministers' negotiations in the Council of Ministers.

Here it has to be pointed out once more that the perspective – parliament on one side; government on the other – is misleading. Of course, deputies of the governmental majority have other means of gaining information and influence over 'their' ministers than those of the opposition. But on the European level the government can always claim the necessity of supranational compromise and thus evade scrutiny and influence at home. And this is not only true for the opposition but also with respect to the majority in parliament – different from the situation in national decision-making processes discussed earlier. Meanwhile the amended Art. 23 of the German Constitution and the establishment of a specialised EU Affairs Committee – the EU Ausschuss – have slightly improved the Bundestag's chances to influence European law-making. But altogether, one cannot refrain from diagnosing that EU legislation is a – growing – field of deparliamentarisation. Little consolation can be found in the fact that some of the influence lost for national parliaments is retrieved by the European Parliament. And for the German Bundestag the gravity of this finding is mitigated a little because hitherto European politics and integration in general was an issue of great unanimity between the German parties. Whether this EU friendliness will continue remains to be seen. Growing concerns of the electorate may change the attitudes of Members of the Bundestag, as empirical research has shown.

Hence it seems that a deparliamentarisation has taken place for the Bundestag when it comes to EU issues. Whether informal patterns of politics and networks between national and European actors are developing and will counteract this development will have to be examined further.

The keyword for the last aspect of my topic is globalisation or internationalisation. Formal law-making powers have not been conferred onto levels outside national, subnational and supranational institutions. But representatives of the national government cooperate in international organisations and conferences with government representatives from other nations. And the decisions taken there can bind national legislatures to quite some extent and may have considerable effects on national populations. Well known examples are the WTO, World Climate or Water Conferences.

What we saw as a loosening of the bond between the government and its majority in the case of the EU becomes even more salient in this international context. The specific logic of politics by negotiation makes it extremely difficult for parliaments to scrutinise and influence their governments in such environments. Different from

the EU, there are no parliamentary assemblies on that level that exert at least some oversight and carry some – if only indirect – democratic legitimation into these processes. Global policy networks aggravate this situation even more. There, governments are only one actor among many others, including global corporations, transnational associations and non-governmental organisations operating at a worldwide level. These networks are often praised as a great chance for the global engagement of civil society. However, this should not let us forget the urgent question: What about democratic legitimacy?

Hitherto parliaments were established as a source of legitimacy, and by and large they were successful in liberal democracies. Today the citizens experience more and more often what political scientists call a gap between input and output: The demands of the people are not matched by the capacities and capabilities of the state and its institutions. In a number of policy fields the latter cannot determine any longer the description and the solution of problems; they lose their capacity of hierarchical steering – at least with regard to certain actors – and of autonomous decision-making. Correspondingly, parliaments and governments lose responsiveness. Making voters believe that their interests can be represented comprehensively and effectively by the classical institutions of the nation-state becomes ever harder. And given the restrictions in finding solutions on the global level this lack of responsiveness can mostly not be compensated by output efficiency either. This is a salient problem for governments. For parliaments it becomes crucial. They are the key institutions in securing democratic legitimacy. To the extent that they are only highly indirect participants in global decision-making processes they are deprived of their core function.

CONCLUSIONS

On the national level deparliamentarisation cannot be confirmed for the German Bundestag. Protagonists of the thesis neglect, in particular, the existence of the closely linked and cohesive governmental majority and thus the functional logic of parliamentary systems. They also exaggerate phenomena like the role of expert commissions and interest group involvement in the policy process. On the European level the picture is less friendly for the Bundestag: Loss of competencies and a restricted grip on its government on the side of the parliamentary majority; informal instruments and patterns of control that could compensate these deficits seem to be developing only slowly. On the global level parliamentary influence has hardly arrived at all and democratic legitimacy is under particular threat here.

Those who diagnose deparliamentarisation especially in the national context recommend a 'post-parliamentary institutional design' where the arena of negotiations is separated from the parliamentary arena. Parliaments would be restricted to present diverging social interests and the results of negotiations to the public. In my view that would mean to bring about intentionally what is – according to the deparliamentarisation thesis – already in full swing: the hollowing out of parliament as a decision-maker and its reduction to two functions: articulating interests and making politics public. Given that the latter is firmly in the hands of the media this post-parliamentary design would render the deparliamentarisation thesis into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The Bundestag has so far managed to be an active, serious partner in policy-making. Acting and talking must not be disconnected if parliaments are not to lose their core function: to guarantee democratic legitimation. There is no alternative in sight to parliamentary representation when it comes to combining responsiveness and leadership in a democratically responsible way. I think it is appropriate here to conclude with a sentence that Winston Churchill spoke in the House of Commons 60 years ago: 'Democracy is the worst form of government, except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.'

<div align="center">NOTE</div>

Lecture given at the Annual Conference of the International Association for the Study of German Politics in London, April 2008, based on my contribution to: Werner J. Patzelt, Martin Sebaldt and Uwe Kranenpohl (eds.), *Res publica semper reformanda. Festschrift für Heinrich Oberreuter zum 65. Geburtstag* (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2007), pp.240–53. Please refer to this text for references to literature cited or alluded to in this lecture.