Party Institutions, the SPD and the Fall of Franz Müntefering

John Leslie
Political Science and International Relations, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

Franz Müntefering's resignation as Chairman of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) on 31 October 2005 after only eighteen months caught most observers by surprise–especially German Social Democrats. His fall was the unintended consequence of a contest in the SPD Executive Committee to nominate the party's new general secretary. Neither Müntefering nor those who voted against his preferred candidate for general secretary sought his departure. Indeed, Müntefering was the kind of chairman the SPD had not experienced since Erich Ollenhauer in the 1950s: he was not a charismatic electoral leader, but rather a disciplined, energetic party man–an "old school" Social Democrat who was popular with rank-and-file members. Furthermore, a month before his resignation, Chairman Müntefering and Chancellor Gerhard Schröder snatched a strategic victory from certain defeat in an election that made it impossible to form a stable parliamentary majority without their party. As Schröder departed the political stage, Müntefering marshaled an uncharacteristically disciplined SPD to successful coalition negotiations with a Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and a Christian Social Union (CSU) weakened by a poor showing in the election. Given that Müntefering piloted the party through these troubled waters, why did Social Democrats provoke his resignation, shattering the SPD's renewed image of competence and weakening the nascent grand coalition?

Müntefering's resignation is interesting because it fits into a pattern of very public internal party conflicts over policy and personnel decisions, stretching back to the SPD's postwar reconstruction.

doi:10.3167/gps.2007.250101

Indeed, one set of observers, noting the SPD's capacity for internal dissension, describe it as "loosely coupled anarchy."[1] How can the existence and persistence of this pattern of decision making or organizational anarchy be explained?

This article argues that this pattern of conflictual, or competitive, decision making results from the "representative" rules that Social Democrats constructed to govern hierarchy in the postwar party organization. More generally, it argues that the existence of rules governing organizational hierarchy make parties not just organizations, but also institutions with peculiar, path-dependent histories. The SPD's pattern of competitive decision making and its institutional explanation are important because they point toward an institutional theory of party organization to complement the already well-developed theory of the electoral market.

The SPD demonstrates how a party's hierarchical structure may vary from clichés about oligarchy and how its behavior can depart from assumptions about the team-like pursuit of electoral goals. Admittedly, the SPD is only a single case—even an outlier with respect to the representativeness of its hierarchical structure and the competitiveness of its internal decision making. Yet, precisely as an outlier, the party provides an unusually clear demonstration of the relationship between a particular hierarchical structure and a party's internal, decision-making behavior.

This article proceeds in three parts. The next section explains how and why rules governing internal hierarchy turn party organizations into institutions that are characterized by different patterns of decision-making behavior and peculiar paths of development. It also demonstrates how this institutional and path-dependent view of party organization complements existing, "neo-classical" perspectives of party systems and change. A second section illustrates how postwar reconstruction created a "representative" hierarchy within the SPD and competitive processes surrounding personnel and policy decisions. It places the events leading to Müntefering's resignation within this context, demonstrating how the party's organizational structure shaped individual actors' behavior and precipitated unintended consequences. A final section provides some concluding observations.

Party Structure: Rules and Internal Hierarchy

Müntefering's fall stands out because it fits a pattern in which the SPD's internal dynamics have a negative impact on its external image. The party's organization channels members' self-interested, careerist behavior toward open internal conflict, rather than toward team-like cooperation in pursuit of electoral goals. Over the years, many political scientists have explained how organizational structure can produce internal competition as well as more team-like internal decision making. They do not explain, however, why party architects might choose one structure over the other or why these structures persist across decades. This section provides an institutional explanation for the diverse rules that govern internal hierarchies in parties and the persistence of that diversity over time. It considers first the organizational and institutional foundations of structural diversity. Then, it demonstrates how an institutional explanation of party diversity complements "neo-classical" understandings of party systems by showing how different party structures are suited to different contingencies in a party's environment.

Hierarchy, Cooperation and Competition within Party Organizations

The structure of party organizations can vary in many ways. Most importantly, parties differ in how they construct internal hierarchies. In brief, political scientists recognize (sometimes implicitly) that the internal hierarchies of parties can project decision-making authority upward in an "oligarchic" structure or downward in a "representative" structure. In general, political scientists emphasize oligarchic hierarchies in party organizations, because such structures fit comfortably with their models of representative democracy and normative commitments to voter sovereignty. The problem with this received wisdom is that neither hierarchical organization nor representative democracy creates a deterministic drive toward either oligarchy or representative hierarchy inside parties. Rather, the members of parties must create rules to manage countervailing centripetal and centrifugal tendencies.

Given the assumption that party organizations are oligarchic, this institutional infrastructure is said to channel individuals' careerist self

interest toward the representation of social interests in public policy. This perspective builds on Joseph Schumpeter's insight that politicians represent social interests in public policy not out of altruism, but because of their individual interest in holding public office. Schumpeter pointed out that fortunately for democracies, regular, competitive elections could compel politicians to serve the public interest in order to achieve their individual ambitions. Politicians offered policies in return for the votes that put them in office–competitors kept them honest.[2]

Nevertheless, Schumpeter's insights about the role of electoral institutions in representative democracies do not resolve the related problems of organization and leadership in political parties. Parties rather than individuals contest most elections. Because they are complex organizations, parties confront a collective action problem when it comes to organizing the efforts of many individuals to win public office. Specifically, the number of activists interested in political careers exceeds the supply of leadership positions and candidacies that the party can distribute. Without some means to coordinate individual behavior, competing ambitions to fill scarce candidacies and leadership posts can undermine the cooperation that is essential to win elections. How do parties ensure that their members cooperate in pursuit of a single set of goals?[3]

One argument suggests that an innate tendency of organization toward oligarchy resolves the problem of coordination. Since mass parties first appeared in the late nineteenth century, observers have argued that these organizations automatically provide their leaders with the capacity to steer the party from above.[4] In explaining his "iron law of oligarchy," Robert Michels enumerated the advantages that complex organizations give those at the top of their hierarchies over their followers: command over legal rules, career ladders, external resources, and popular recognition. In short, control over information and resources permits leaders not only to steer the party organization but also to commandeer it somewhat deceptively for their own purposes. The existence of these forces permits party leaders to steer their organizations toward a team-like pursuit of electoral goals unhampered by organizational constraints. If this were the case, however, why would anyone participate in a party, knowing that they had no realistic chance of holding office or even knowing

what the true capabilities and intentions of the leaders were? While centripetal tendencies toward oligarchy certainly exist in organizations, this observation points to the existence of a countervailing centrifugal tendency.[5]

Another perspective on party organization rejects the notion of a bias toward oligarchy altogether, suggesting instead that collective action problems and the voluntary nature of association in democratic parties place constraints on leaders' careerist ambitions. Most famously, John May's "law of curvilinear disparity" suggests that the problem of collective action, specifically the need to motivate individuals to participate in party work, constrains leaders' careerist behavior.[6] May argues that only individuals with more extreme policy preferences than average have an incentive to engage in party work without the realistic prospect for individual career advancement. Yet, without their labor, the party cannot compete effectively. Leaders, therefore, must "buy" compliance and the labor of members by adopting policy positions that are more extreme than those of average voters.

Even more intriguing than debates about whether members' preferences are more extreme than those of leaders or voters is how May—as well as arguments about members' incentives and the "exchange" relationship between them and leaders more generally—contradicts Michels' position.[7] May assumes that members command reasonably good information about leaders' capabilities and intentions and that they are able to use it to control leaders. He argues further that the problems of voluntary organization create bias not toward oligarchy but toward representative hierarchy in parties. Interestingly, the thrust of his argument about curvilinearity is that this tendency has negative consequences for a party's electoral competitiveness.[8]

A juxtaposition of Michels' and May's arguments illustrates the existence of countervailing centripetal and centrifugal tendencies within party organizations, as well as their structural, behavioral and informational consequences. Centripetal tendencies push toward structures that centralize decision-making authority—oligarchy—while centrifugal tendencies drive toward structures that decentralize authority. Structures that concentrate decision making into a single individual or relatively small group are more likely to coordinate

collective behavior toward intentional outcomes, whereas those that decentralize authority may prevent (quite intentionally) precisely this type of coordination. Instead, they may loosely coordinate collective behavior that results from the unintended consequences of individual interactions, as exemplified by Adam Smith's "invisible hand." Centralized and decentralized structures also have different consequences for the distribution of information. It is far easier for central authorities to control the flow of information in an oligarchy than in a decentralized system. The architects of party organizations must somehow manage all of these tensions.

Anyone who has worked in an organization has likely observed that its successful operation requires a balance of centralized and decentralized decision making. On the one hand, certain issues must be decided centrally to provide coherent overall direction to the organization. The attempt to make all decisions centrally, however, is likely to collapse from information overload or as a result of incompatibilities between unique events and standard operating procedures. Decentralization, on the other hand, provides subordinates opportunities to exploit their organizational roles for private interests just as centralization provides such opportunities to leaders. History is replete with examples of prefects, viceroys, and paladins who exploited local opportunities for personal gain far from the oversight of central authority. The hierarchies of all organizations, including those of political parties, must seek to limit and balance centripetal tendencies toward oligarchy as well as centrifugal tendencies toward fission.[9]

Party organizations manage these tensions through rules governing internal hierarchies that permit parties to prevent the worst excesses of oligarchy and fission. These rules set standards for the behavior of individuals performing party duties, provide means to monitor that performance, and create sanctions to enforce behavioral standards. Rules of hierarchy govern the conduct of central decision makers, as well as the behavior of those to whom they delegate operational functions. Thus, organizational rules counter both the centralizing and decentralizing tendencies of organization. For example, they may subject leaders to regular internal elections, making leaders accountable to a constituency of lower organizational strata or in a particular region. Such "representative"

structures dampen tendencies toward oligarchy and impose a decentralizing moment into party decision-making. Alternatively, rules may permit central leaders to select and dismiss individuals filling important roles at lower organizational levels or in particular regions. By making subordinates accountable to central leaders for material rewards and career advancement, these rules counteract centrifugal tendencies and inject a degree of centralization into decision-making processes. While rules prevent the destructive extremes of oligarchy or fission, they rarely balance this tension perfectly. Instead, they favor one direction or the other: by pulling leadership accountability and decision making to decentralized points in the organization, or by granting central leaders the power of patronage to shape subordinates' behavior.

The historical circumstances existing when actors construct or reconstruct a party organization, influence whether hierarchical rules end up reinforcing tendencies toward centralization or decentralization. This insight is not new, dating back at least to Maurice Duverger's distinction between parliamentary or extra-parliamentary origins of parties.[10] The novelty here is the relationship drawn between the circumstances of a party organization's construction and the regulation of its internal hierarchies. All parties must avoid the extremes of oligarchy and fission, but the conditions prevailing when actors construct organizational hierarchies usually make the dangers of either centralization or decentralization appear more threatening *at that moment.* Accordingly, actors build "representative" or "co-optive" structures into the organization to reinforce the countervailing tendency.

The circumstances of construction–through the rules governing internal hierarchies–also impart a path-dependence to the party's development.[11] Once in place, these rules become part of the structures that permit party members to operate collectively. Because actors value the outcomes that this collective action creates for them collectively and individually, parties become institutions. Subsequent attempts to modify these rules risk awakening settled fights about the distribution of rewards from collective action that may threaten to fracture the party. Because individuals' interests have coalesced around and been "sunk" into particular hierarchical structures, these rules are unlikely to change even after the circumstances

which gave rise to them disappear. The electoral college in the U.S., for example, survives although the fears that led to its creation have disappeared. Because of institutional "inertia," therefore, conditions that gave rise to the rules governing a party's organizational hierarchy may influence its behavior long after they have disappeared.

Institutional Inertia, Environmental Contingency and Party Diversity

The preceding section provided an institutional explanation of how parties acquire specific organizational structures that cause them to behave differently. This perspective also suggests that a party's organizational structure influences its subsequent development. This institutional and path-dependent perspective stands in tension with the "neo-classical" perspective[12] that emphasizes the forces driving party organizations and systems to become more alike. This tension, however, may be more apparent than real. While some factors do indeed push parties to adopt similar organizational structures and behaviors, parties also confront changing circumstances that favor different organizational capacities at different times. Thus, different organizational capacities may serve the electoral interests of parties–as well as more general interests in democratic stability–at different times. Yet, individual parties are not equally equipped to meet all challenges.[13] This section first examines how "neo-classical" perspectives on party organization, behavior and change draw attention away from the differing capacities of parties, focusing rather on the forces that push parties and party systems toward greater similarity. Then, it demonstrates how oligarchic and representative party structures might perform differently in environments where voters' interests are more stable versus those where they are more fluid.

"Neo-classical" perspectives understand change in parties as a one-way process: party organizations are parts of a larger system that adapts as a whole to the changing demands of the political and social environment. From this perspective, party organizations become the analogues of firms in microeconomic theory and change in party systems is analogous to microeconomic models of market adjustment. Peridocially, an institutional, social or technological "exogenous shock" may disrupt the party system. Individual parties respond to the shock with trial-and-error experimentation, and then

competitive pressures drive parties to imitate the "most appropriate" behavioral and organizational responses to environmental change.

This perspective views the impact of internal, party-organizational forces on systemic adaptation stochastically. There is some probability that any given party organization will provide an entrepreneurial response to the shock. Similarly, there is some probability that inertia will impede a particular organization's adaptation. Nevertheless, there is no attempt to distinguish between parties that can act entrepreneurially and adapt easily to the innovations of others and those that cannot. Moreover, the overriding concern of "neo-classical" perspectives is whether such capacities exist *in the system*, not in its individual units. If successful behavioral and/or organizational responses to a shock are found, competitive pressures must cause their diffusion through the system. Thus, while the "neo-classical" approach does not reject organizational difference, it diverts attention away from diversity to forces driving conformity, generating a strong expectation that parties in comparable environments should look and act more alike over time.

This perspective underlies the most important explanations of party change in postwar political science including: Duverger's "contagion from the Left" that compelled all parties to adopt "class-mass" structures; Otto Kirchheimer's explanation of the postwar transformation of European parties into the catch-all variant, Leon Epstein's "contagion from the Right," Angelo Panebianco's description of the rise of "electoral-professional parties," as well as Richard Katz and Peter Mair's analysis of "cartel parties."[14] There is no doubt that powerful forces impose pressures on parties to conform, but the existence of these factors does not preclude the possibility of multiple forces pushing in different directions. Because they focus at the systemic rather than the organizational level, however, "neo-classical" explanations of party change provide little help in understanding why organizational and behavioral diversity among parties may persist.

By assuming a systemic perspective, "neoclassical" views treat party change in an ahistorical way. They ignore the fact of party longevity and the possibility that a party's organizational and behavioral responses to past challenges may influence its reactions to present and future shocks. In fact, many of the parties described in the

studies listed above have survived more than one transformation of their environment. Past responses may help or hurt in meeting subsequent challenges in the environment, but this depends on the organizational capacities a party has developed in the past, as well as the nature of those challenges.

Consider, for example, the relative competitive capacities of parties with oligarchic and representative hierarchies in the environment of Kirchheimer's postwar "transformation:" institutions of the "electoral market" settle into an electorate with clearly defined and well organized interests.[15] Under these conditions, a party that is able to aggregate and translate diverse preferences into policy programs serves its own electoral interests, as well as the systemic interest in democratic stability. Kirchheimer conjectured that under these circumstances parties with oligarchic hierarchies would fare better than those with representative structures. This is because as Anthony Downs famously explained, voters who seek particular policies are likely to have greater confidence in the appeals of parties with a record of honoring past statements.[16] In general, parties with a centralized decision-making structure can manage the tension between flexibility and credibility demanded by this environment better than those with representative hierarchies and contested decision making. The fact that this type of environment existed in postwar Western Europe and North America, cases to which most theorists were responding, explains political scientists' emphasis on oligarchy.

Now consider the relative capacities of parties with different hierarchical structures in an environment where the composition of the electorate is changing in uncertain ways and interests are not well organized. In such fluid environments, parties have sometimes not been an "aggregator" but a "leader" of interests, articulating and refining the evolving interests of groups in the electorate. Party organizations that grant new ideas an open hearing and permit individuals who advance them to climb the leadership ladder are more likely to attract the advocates of new social interests. Albert Hirschman pointed out that organizations, which deny individuals "voice," are likely to provoke their "exit," rather than their "loyalty." [17] With parties in a democracy, the reverse may also hold: an organization that provides "voice" is more likely to encourage "entrance" and "loyalty" of entrepreneurs seeking representation for new interests. A party

with a representative hierarchy that permits advocates of new ideas to advance, even at the expense of incumbents attached to established clienteles, is more likely to attract the entrepreneurs of new interests than an oligarchy that thwarts the rise of those with untested ideas. The ability to shape the composition of the electorate offers electoral advantages to the party that can manage the feat. Moreover, to the extent that it promotes the integration of new interests, organizational openness promotes the stability of representative democracy.

Different environmental challenges favor different organizational capacities, but not all parties command the same structures or capabilities. Organizational capacity depends on a party's past experiences, particularly the circumstances of its construction. That being the case, it must be recognized that organizational structure is not fate. While representative structures tend to be more conducive to innovation, it is conceivable that an oligarchic party in the hands of entrepreneurial leaders might be very innovative.[18] Similarly, while oligarchies tend to be more coherent, it is not unthinkable for the members of a party with a representative structure to unite behind a policy or leader or to resist the entrance of new-comers. Even a careful consideration of organizational diversity cannot exhaust the sources of behavioral variance among parties and party systems.

The Postwar SPD and the Fall of Müntefering

The circumstances of Allied occupation and the Cold War conflict between German Social Democrats and Communists put in place the decentralized hierarchical structure that contributed to Müntefering's resignation six decades later. The threat that a party leadership might dictate the fusion of the SPD and Communist Party of Germany (KPD) from above (as was happening elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe), made centralization the principal threat in the struggle to rebuild the SPD in the minds of many Social Democrats. In order to limit communist influence, Social Democrats put in place a representative hierarchical structure that pushed power over personnel and substantive decisions from the center down to lower party units, particularly the party's district organizations. This kind of structure tends to turn internal personnel and policy decisions

into conflicts between the party's center–the chairman and the central organizational apparatus in Bonn/Berlin–and regional party actors. The following section demonstrates how the founding struggle after the war embedded decentralization in rules governing the relationship between the party's center and its district organizations. It also documents a pattern of center-periphery conflicts in the SPD's substantive and personnel decision making.

First, the Allied administration prevented reconstruction of the centralized pre-1933 SPD by shifting resources and influence to the party's district organizations.[19] The centralization of the pre-1933 SPD rested on the central executive's control over the party's material resources. With these resources, the executive hired, trained and promoted a cadre of professional party secretaries that ran the party's day-to-day business down to the sub-district level.[20] The division of Germany into occupation zones and the Western Allies' refusal to license interzonal party authorities meant that the few SPD material assets that survived the Nazi dictatorship and war were returned to the district organizations and not to a central executive.[21] Furthermore, until 1950 district leaderships, not the central executive, set and collected membership dues, and from the late 1940s onward district organizations assumed responsibility for the employment of their own paid functionaries.[22] Article 8(2) of the postwar SPD statute codifies the expansion of the district organizations' influence at the expense of national party organs, making the districts, each of which has its own statute, the "foundation *(Grundlage)* of the organization." This principle is reinforced by the rules that govern relations between the district organizations and the central leadership.

The rules that shape relations between the SPD's central and district organs reflect a struggle for leadership of the political Left that took place between German Social Democrats and Communists in 1945-6. In an opening act of the Cold War, rival claims to the SPD's national leadership became a conflict between the advocates of conflicting visions of the party hierarchy: democratic centralism and party democracy.[23] Soviet occupational authorities licensed a "national" SPD leadership in Berlin, the Central Committee (*Zentralausschuß*), and pressured it to fuse the SPD and KPD organizations. In the Soviet Zone, these efforts produced the Socialist Unity Party (SED) that held power in the German Democratic Republic until

1989-90. In the British Zone, a rival leadership under Kurt Schumacher resisted cooperation with the Communists and rejected the right of any SPD leadership to decree a fundamental organizational transformation. Schumacher held that only a duly constituted party congress could take such action. Until the Allies permitted a national SPD congress, he insisted, the district organizations remained the SPD's highest legal authorities. This delaying tactic permitted Schumacher's party allies–with British and American support–to consolidate their control over Western district organizations and ensure Schumacher a majority at a future national party congress.

By staking his claim to leadership on opposition to the Central Committee's "democratic centralism," Schumacher entrenched the representative principle in the relationship between the SPD's central and district organs. The party statute that grew out of this conflict makes the representative nature of this relationship explicit. The same article that makes the districts the SPD's organizational foundation also proclaims that the process of policy formation (*Willensbildung*) in the party "take place from the bottom up."[24] Rules governing the selection of delegates to party congresses and the election of the party executive reinforce this representational relationship. Each district or its component sub-districts, elects a number of the 400 voting delegates to national party congresses in proportion to the number of their dues-paying members.[25] The statute also limits *ex officio* delegates with voting rights to incumbent members of the executive *(Vorstand)*.[26] These delegates then elect the chairperson, his or her deputies, the general secretary and treasurer, as well as the members of a new executive in several rounds. The incumbent executive must compose and publicize the list of candidates two weeks before the congress.[27] Additional candidates for the Executive can be added to the ballot–with names presented in alphabetical order–up to one day before the election, provided these candidates have the support of forty delegates.[28] Elections to the executive take place on a secret ballot and positions are filled according to who wins the highest number of votes (contingent upon maintenance of the 40 percent gender quota). Since 1958, the newly elected executive then elects five or six of its members to sit with the chairman, deputies, general secretary and treasurer as the party's presidium, which acts as the operational executive. This representative structure makes

individuals in the party's peak organs accountable to constituents in the district organizations, and often even lower party organs.

This bottom-up construction creates incentives for ambitious individuals to contest personnel and policy decisions in an open fight within the party. In fact, the rules governing the SPD's internal hierarchy are the party-organizational analogue of electoral institutions in Schumpeter's model of representative democracy. They bind the careerist ambitions of individuals to the representation of internal constituencies from lower organizational strata–principally regionally based ones. In the contemporary party, ideological groupings (e.g., the Partei Linke/Frankfurter Kreis on the Left and the Seeheimer Kreis on the Right) and the functional divisions of organized working groups (e.g., youth (Jusos) and employees' (AfA) organizations) crosscut regional divisions. To win a national party office or a seat in the executive, an ambitious individual must curry support from regional and factional groupings among party congress delegates, who are themselves accountable to particular constituencies within district organizations. Most of the time, negotiation, logrolling, and even proportional formulas between regions and groups prevent party congress elections from becoming divisive, public floor fights between factions.

When compromise fails, however, the logic of numbers decides the outcome. Under such circumstances, the SPD's representative structure forces candidates for a contested office, or the advocates of a contested policy, to differentiate themselves and compete with their opponents for delegates' votes. Just as competitive elections make politicians' behavior more transparent in Schumpeter's model, competition makes personnel and policy decisions more transparent within the SPD, as well as to the general public. In the immediate postwar era, the intent and effect of these representative rules were to prevent oligarchic decision making.

The impact of this decentralized structure is recognizable in a series of open, center-periphery conflicts that stretch from the SPD's founding struggle to Müntefering's resignation. From the moment of his triumph over the Central Committee in 1946, Schumacher found it necessary to build alliances with leaders in some regional organizations to resist opponents in others. The chairman's most visible conflicts were with Wilhelm Kaisen, Max Brauer and Ernst Reuter–mayors of Bre-

men, Hamburg and Berlin respectively–who resisted his opposition to all cooperation with Konrad Adenauer's CDU-led government.[29] A decade-long struggle over rearmament in the 1950s pitted first Schumacher, then Chairman Ollenhauer, and finally the post-1958 leadership against pacifists in regional organizations. In this contest, regional leaders used party resources to resist not only the leadership's position on rearmament but also its interdiction of all extra-parliamentary opposition.[30] Finally, the reorganization of the SPD's central leadership organs that took place at the 1958 Stuttgart Party Congress reflected the triumph of a coalition of district leaders over a power-sharing arrangement worked out between the party's central and parliamentary leaders. With this triumph, regional leaders completed the "federalization" of the SPD's executive and presidium.

As the constituencies from which the SPD drew support became more diverse in the 1960s and 1970s, this pattern of center-periphery conflict duplicated itself throughout the party at lower and lower levels of the organization. The party's representative hierarchy presents an inviting opportunity for new interests in the electorate to seek political representation. Small groups of motivated activists can capture organizational sub-units of the party from which they cannot easily be dislodged. These organizational beachheads then provide new interests platforms from which to project their appeals not only to the center of the party but also to the center of the political system. An unending stream of internal debates over nuclear energy, the environment, nuclear missiles and the right to political asylum reflect the interaction of a diversifying electorate and the SPD's representative hierarchy. This organizational structure has turned the SPD into a competitive electoral arena wholly contained within the broader competitive arena of German electoral politics. The party's fights with itself over nuclear energy or political asylum demonstrate that it does not take positions on issues so much as issues take positions within the SPD.

The Rise and Fall of Franz Müntefering

Franz Müntefering's resignation illustrates how the SPD's hierarchical structure influences the party's internal decision-making process

and its electoral image. Unlike some political parties, notably those in the U.S., the SPD organization distinguishes between dues-paying members, who may take part in internal party decision making, and the external electorate that votes to fill public offices. This organizational boundary between members and voters combines with the party's representative hierarchy to bind party leaders into two separate relationships of accountability. Some leaders are accountable to a constituency of party members, some are accountable to voters, and some are accountable to both. Internal relationships of accountability are further fragmented, binding leaders to separate regional or functional constituencies. This decentralization of accountability sets up several lines of potential conflict within the organization. First, those aspiring to rise between levels in the party organization must secure their positions within a home region or functional group, and use this power base *(Hausmacht)* to curry support in other groups that select leaders at the next level. This creates horizontal competition between individuals seeking to rise through the ranks. Second, this structure also creates a potential for vertical competition similar to May's curvilinearity between leaders who are accountable to external constituencies of voters–usually more senior leaders–and those who are accountable only to internal party constituencies. Within these lines of cleavage, substantive and personnel decisions in the SPD may provoke both horizontal and vertical forms of competition.

The Party's Chairman

Müntefering's resignation was not provoked by widespread resistance to the chairman among party members. Rather, Müntefering enjoyed considerable popularity among rank-and-file Social Democrats. Part of this popularity resulted from a studied avoidance of internal ideological conflicts. Müntefering maintained cordial relations with individuals and groupings representing all of the SPD's internal tendencies. More importantly, his rise from humble origins was a welcome reminder of the movement's origins to many Social Democrats. Born the son of a Catholic farmer in 1940, Müntefering completed an apprenticeship in Germany's industrial heartland and never attended university. This background spared him the labels "68er" and "grandchild (Enkel) of Willy Brandt" that are associated

with the seemingly self-indulgent ambition of many leaders who rose through the SPD's student-dominated youth organization (Jusos). Rather, Müntefering stood as an authentic blue collar counterpoint to the likes of Heidimarie Wieczorek-Zeul, Rudolf Scharping, Oskar Lafontaine, and especially Gerhard Schröder. To many rank-and-file Social Democrats, Müntefering was a reminder that the party's original mission was to promote the collective goals of society's humble, rather than the careers of ambitious individuals.

Müntefering's popularity within the SPD also reflects the fact that he played an integrative role within the party as he rose to national prominence. Müntefering took each step upward in response to a request to serve the party. In 1995, then-governor of North Rhine Westphalia (NRW), Johannes Rau, propelled Müntefering onto the national stage by asking him to fill the vacant position of SPD federal manager (Bundesgeschäftsführer)–the predecessor position to today's SPD general secretary. Müntefering consolidated his position at the national level with the (re) shuffling of positions that accompanied the SPD and Green Party's control of the federal government after 1998–always maintaining the appearance of being the party's humble and loyal servant. To make room for Party Chairman Lafontaine's candidate, Ottmar Schreiner, Müntefering resigned as federal manager and became transportation minister. When Rau resigned as governor and SPD chairman in NRW to become the federal president, Müntefering assumed leadership of the SPD's organization in Germany's largest state and the Social Democrats' heartland. In 1999, when the truce between Lafontaine and Schröder collapsed, precipitating the resignation of the party chairman and his federal manager, Müntefering once again filled the vacuum at the top of the party organization. Schröder, whose relationship with the party was always troubled, became chairman but called Müntefering to manage the party organization in the newly created position of general secretary.

After the 2002 election Müntefering rapidly became the bridge that connected the party to Schröder's government. He did not return to the cabinet after the election, but assumed leadership of the SPD Parliamentary Group (Bundestag Fraktion). As the SPD's parliamentary leader, Müntefering managed the growing tension between the policies of Schröder's government and their opponents inside the party, especially in the SPD Bundestag Fraktion. By March 2004, a

string of defeats in state elections incited open opposition in the Parliamentary Group and made Schröder's position as party chairman untenable. The chancellor resigned the chairmanship in favor of Müntefering. A party congress then elected Müntefering by a margin of 95.1 percent, the best result for an SPD chairman since 1991, before the rise of the "68er" cohort.

As both party chairman and parliamentary leader, Müntefering was now Schröder's equal within the party and an indispensable partner in governance. Müntefering maintained party unity, acting when necessary, as the leftist counterpoint to Schröder's more rightest reforms. Thus, Müntefering kept Social Democrats (grudgingly) united behind their chancellor, while Schröder remained popular with voters at the middle of the German electorate. Given his importance to the party both inside and outside the organization, it is surprising that Social Democrats soon provoked his resignation.

Müntefering's Fall

What makes Müntefering's resignation interesting is that few Social Democrats intended it to happen or welcomed it when it did. His resignation was the result of individuals pursuing careerist interests within the incentive structure set by the SPD's decentralized organization and bounded rationality. The chairman resigned after his candidate lost a contested vote to become the Executive Committee's nominee for the post of general secretary. In the context of the negotiations with the CDU/CSU over a new government, the general secretary was a position of secondary importance. Indeed, the position's relative unimportance may have led all sides to ignore the implications of a contested vote, particularly if as eventually happened, Müntefering's candidate lost. This section describes how the party's structure turned a choice between two candidates into a competitive showdown that cost Müntefering his job and that damaged the SPD's image among voters.

The equilibrium between party and government that Müntefering maintained as Schröder's partner became untenable after the chancellor's departure. As long as Schröder remained chancellor, Müntefering represented a counterweight–or at least a preferable alternative–for Social Democrats dissatisfied with Schröder's policies and autocratic leadership style. After Schröder's departure, however,

personnel and policy grievances within the party focused on Müntefering as the SPD's principal leader. The personnel changes that accompanied the ambiguous election results and the transition to a grand coalition raised many (often conflicting) expectations among Social Democrats. The SPD's surprise electoral success relative to the Union's dismal performance, defused a potential challenge from the party's Left to jettison Schröder's reform programs and the individuals associated with them. Yet, it did not assuage the bruised egos that many prominent party members suffered as a result of Schröder's (and Müntefering's) blunt leadership style. After Müntefering pushed through a roster of Social Democratic ministers for the incoming government with an efficiency and discipline uncharacteristic of the SPD, these resentments erupted in a semi-organized, and self-defeating palace tiff.

The position of general secretary and Müntefering's nominee, Kajo Wasserhövel, became the target for these resentments. After the incumbent, Klaus Uwe Benneter, stepped down, Müntefering considered eliminating the position that was created for him in 1999 and returning solely to the old post of federal manager, already occupied by Wasserhövel. Instead, he placed his long-time confidant before the Executive Committee for nomination as general secretary. Frustrated at having been left out of the cabinet spoils but unwilling to attack their party's ministers, a group of young SPD Bundestag representatives, the "networkers," supported by prominent leaders of the party's Left, proposed one of their own, Andrea Nahles, as an alternative to Wasserhövel. The group pointed out that Nahles had risen by building a solid basis of support inside and outside the party. Wasserhövel, on the other hand, rested his claim on his bureaucratic skills and allegiance to Müntefering. The conflict over the general secretary position resulted not from a dispute over policy, or even a rejection of Müntefering's person, but rather as a way to register grievances over thwarted career expectations and the brusque decision-making style of the Schröder-Müntefering era.

The escalation of this tiff demonstrates how the mechanisms by which the SPD ultimately settles contested personnel and policy decisions produces unintended consequences. In general, leaders and ambitious careerists in most parties seek to avoid showdown confrontations because–win or lose–they burn bridges to individuals

and groups whose support may be critical at a later date. In such circumstances, compromise is usually preferable to victory. Some conflicts, however, defy compromise and require definitive solutions.

Party organizations delegate authority to make such critical decisions in different ways. Rather than granting fiat to its chairman, or a handful of leaders in the presidium, the SPD diffuses such authority more broadly. The party's electoral rules grant executive organs at each organizational level the right to nominate candidates for party functions.[31] The election statute, however, mandates that candidate selection take place by secret ballot.[32] On critical personnel decisions, therefore, the secret ballot transforms SPD executive organs into relatively volatile arenas where individuals hold conflicting interests, large numbers of decision makers make outcomes unpredictable, and the electoral image of the party is a secondary concern.

The nominations for the general secretary position ended up in just such a competitive arena and produced an unintended result. After Müntefering and the "networkers" failed to find a compromise, the contest between Nahles and Wasserhövel ended up before the SPD's Executive Committee for a vote. At this point, both sides failed to understand the gravity of the situation or to signal the significance of the vote to the other side. Perhaps distracted by on-going coalition negotiations and perhaps believing that his support within the party was sufficient to prevail, Müntefering made no indication that Wasserhövel's defeat would provoke his resignation. On the other side, the forty-five members of the executive failed to signal the strength of support for Nahles' candidacy. Thus, only the final tally of twenty-three votes for Nahles, fourteen for Wasserhövel (with one abstention), revealed the balance of power in the executive. Inadvertently, the SPD executive confronted itself (and everyone else) with an embarrassing ambivalence about its chairman's leadership. His authority irreparably damaged, Müntefering resigned immediately, provoking shock and dismay from all quarters, including Nahles and her supporters, who ended up as unwitting regicides.

Andrea Nahles' actions become understandable in the context of the SPD's organizational structure. Career advancement in the SPD cannot be managed from the center. At best, a central leadership can exclude minority candidates in coalition with substantial regional support. Such support is exercised independent of the central leader-

ship, however, and remains fickle. When efforts to diffuse the contest between Nahles and Wasserhövel failed, the vassals were forced to declare their allegiance in a showdown vote. At this point, Nahles credibly presented herself as the "political" candidate, differentiating herself from the "bureaucrat," Wasserhövel. Nahles staked her claim to be general secretary on the representative principle underlying the party's hierarchy and the fact that she represented a broad constituency within the organization. Wasserhövel, on the other hand, represented oligarchy, and the narrow interests of the party bureaucracy and its leader. In such moments the party organization acts not as a team, but as an arena that identifies strongly with the representative institutions that make it such.

Müntefering's Resignation and the SPD's Image

The SPD's internal conflicts are not insulated from public view. Internal party conflicts and campaigns take place in the media, creating a structural problem for the SPD with the electorate. Müntefering's resignation clearly hurt the SPD's electoral image. If he had had the power to designate his own general secretary, this outcome might have been avoided.[34] Yet, as noted above, the SPD's structure creates separate lines of accountability between leaders who are responsible to internal constituencies and those who are responsible to external constituencies. This division creates a possibility for conflict between the careerist ambitions of some party members to win party office–often a pre-requisite for becoming a party candidate for public office–and the careerist ambitions of other party members to win and wield public office. When such conflicts occur, the party appears to the electorate not as a team, but as a pack of squabbling opportunists. What is more, this outcome is likely to occur at critical moments for the party, particularly during governmental transitions and generational changes. This is because incumbent party leaders hold public office, but nevertheless wield relatively few mechanisms to control career paths or the succession within the party organization. Thus, the rise of successor generations often comes in opposition to and at the expense of the party's established leaders, but also often at the expense of the party's most popular electoral candidates and the party's image with voters.[35] The decade-long transition from the Willy Brandt/ Helmut Schmidt/ Herbert Wehner era to the

"Enkel" generation and the current transition reflect this pattern. Finally, internal competition may generate confusion among voters about the party's intentions and integrity.

Changes in voters' perceptions of the party after Müntefering's resignation suggest the operation of all of these mechanisms.[36] In the week following Müntefering's resignation those Germans who said they supported the SPD dropped from 36 percent to 31 percent, while those who said they would vote for the SPD fell from 35 percent to 33 percent. The same poll also indicated a cause for the falling support: the number of respondents who believed the SPD was internally divided increased from 56 percent to 66 percent, while the number of those who did not think so declined from 38 percent to 27 percent. Similarly, 41 percent of respondents felt that Müntefering's resignation was correct, while 50 percent did not (9 percent did not know). When compared to his successor, 15 percent thought that Matthias Platzeck would be better chairman than Müntefering, 8 percent thought he would be worse, but 53 percent did not know enough about Platzeck to form an opinion.[36] Despite his resignation as chairman, Müntefering climbed from a score of 0.9 to 1.2–based on a scale of -5 to +5–in the weekly ratings of Germany's ten most important politicians. Müntefering shared third place overall with Chancellor-to-be, Angela Merkel. He was the highest scoring SPD politician on the list, and, in fact, the only one besides departing chancellor, Gerhard Schröder. Müntefering's departure noticeably increased voters' uncertainties and apprehensions about the SPD.

Müntefering's resignation has returned decision making inside the SPD to a more decentralized state. No longer the party chairman, Müntefering remains Vice Chancellor and Minister for Social Welfare and Labor Market Policy. He is the most powerful Social Democrat in Merkel's government. Ironically, he now occupies the position that Schröder held in the Red-Green government: the representative of "outside" governmental forces within the SPD. Within the party, however, the government is only a single node that shares decision-making authority with the leaderships of the parliamentary group, under the chairman Peter Struck, and of the party organization under Party Chairman Kurt Beck. This trifurcation of authority at the top is congruent with the federalized party structure under-

neath and fits neatly with postwar precedent. This configuration may also permit leaders to vent upward pressures within the party organization, like those associated with Nahles' nomination to be General Secretary. In doing so, however, it is likely to undermine efforts to present a united or coherent image to voters.

Conclusion

This article contends that the structure of party organizations influences their decision-making behavior. In particular, different internal hierarchical structures generate different types of decision-making. Most political scientists have emphasized the relationship between oligarchy and team-like behavior. This article, on the other hand, puts the spotlight on a different set of factors: the SPD's representative hierarchy and the internal competition it generates on important policy and personnel decisions. It uses events surrounding Franz Müntefering's resignation as party chairman in late 2005 to demonstrate how the SPD's organizational structure increased competition and uncertainty around the nomination of the party's general secretary. Ultimately, the competition around this decision produced an outcome–Müntefering's resignation–that was unintended, unwelcome and detrimental to the party's image among voters. Although unintended, this outcome nonetheless fits into a longer pattern associated with the SPD's structure.

The existence of diverse organizational structures among parties is interesting because it sits uncomfortably with the "neo-classical" perspective from which political scientists have conventionally viewed party organizations, behavior and change. This perspective focuses attention on how common environmental constraints put pressures on parties to adopt similar structures and behaviors. This article does not contest the observation that environments constrain parties in similar ways, but rather complements "neo-classical" insights with an institutional and path-dependent approach to party organizations. The constraints shaping the environment when a party is constructed influence the structure of its organization, particularly the rules governing its internal hierarchies. The interests of actors inside and outside the party coalesce around these rules,

enabling them to persist even after change in the circumstances that generated them. Because their internal rules were often constructed under different circumstances, parties confronting similar environmental changes may respond with different forms of decision-making behavior. Ultimately, this article complements the "neo-classical" perspective with the observation that the circumstances of a party's construction, through the impact of organizational rules, influence how a party responds to environmental constraints.

This article indicates a need for a party-organizational theory of the firm to complement an existing and well-developed theory of the electoral market. It provides the barest beginning of such an effort by demonstrating the influence of a single, yet highly important component of structure–organizational hierarchy–on party behavior. We must develop further the understanding of party institutions in order to enrich our grasp of the functions and functioning of systems of interest representation. Diverse organizations and behaviors, including the SPD's seemingly dysfunctional internal conflicts, may offer parties advantages under certain circumstances. Some parties may excel at aggregating and uniting diverse interests behind a single policy platform, while others offer entrepreneurs representing new and untried social interests an organizational platform from which to voice their concerns in the political system. Both aggregation and integration are critical to the stability of representative democracies. This study suggests that, in order to understand the operation and evolution of party systems, we must undertake a comparative, institutional assessment of the organizations that inhabit them.

JOHN LESLIE is a Lecturer in European Politics at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand. He earned his Ph.D. at UC Berkeley. His research focuses on the problems of institutions and institutional change in European political parties and interest organizations.

Notes

1. Peter Lösche and Franz Walter, *The SPD: Klassenpartei, Volkspartei, Quotenpartei* (Darmstadt, 1992), 173-227.
2. Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York, 1976); Anthony Downs, An *Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York, 1956).
3. Concern for the collective action problems created within party organizations draws from the work of Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge, 1965). Observers such as Albert Hirschman (1970) and John May (1965, 1973) focus on the incentives for individuals to participate in party organizations. Their contributions are discussed below. See also Peter B. Clark and James Q. Wilson, "Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations," *Administrative Science Quarterly* vi (1961-2): 129-166.
4. Robert Michels, *Political Parties* (New York, 1962). Mosei Ostrogorsky, *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties* (New York, 1970).
5. Nonetheless, many observers cling to party oligarchy–one suspects–for normative reasons. In the Schumpeterian model of democratic electoral competition, party oligarchy is "a virtue rather than a vice," and "normatively desirable," as it brings leaders' ambitions and party behavior in line with social goals. Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair, "Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party," *Party Politics* 1 no. 1 (1995), 14.
6. John May, "Democracy, Organization, Michels," *American Political Science Review* lix, no. 2 (1965), 417-429 and John May, "Opinion Structure of Political Parties: The Special Law of Curvilinear Disparity," *Political Studies*, xxi, no. 2 (1973), 135-151.
7. See Alan Ware, "Activist-Leader Relations and the Structure of Political Parties: 'Exchange' Models and Vote-Seeking Behavior in Parties," *British Journal of Political Science*, 22, 71-92; See also Panebianco (see note 4); Strøm (see note 4); Scarrow (see note 4); and Joseph A. Schlesinger, "On the Theory of Party Organization," *The Journal of Politics*, 46, no. 2. (1984), 369-400.
8. Some observers (e.g., Panebianco (see note 4) and Katz and Mair (see note 6)) suggest that media technologies have driven a professionalization of campaigning and demand for the services of campaign professionals. In response to this environmental change, so the logic goes, party organizations are transforming away from mass participation toward "leaner" marketing operations where candidates and their staffs substitute financial resources and professional services for the membership participation. The empirical evidence for this transformation is mixed, see Susan Scarrow, "Parties Without Members: Party Organization in a Changing Electoral Environment," in *Parties Without Partisans*,, eds., R. Dalton and M. Wattenberg (Oxford, 2000) 79-101. More importantly–given the thrust of this paper–these general arguments overlook that individual parties might confront common environmental changes with unique institutional capacities. Peculiar institutional rules should permit the leaders of some parties to adapt to environment changes in the expected way more readily than leaders in other parties.
9. For a succinct appraisal of the relative strengths and weaknesses of centralized and decentralized decision-making structures see Charles Linblom, "Authority

Systems: Strong Thumbs, No Fingers," and "The Limited Competence of Markets," Chapters Five and Six in *Politics and Markets* (New York, 1977), 65-92.

10. Duverger (see note 4), xxiii-xxxvii.
11. Paul Pierson, "Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics," *American Political Science Review* 94 (2000), 251-268; James Mahoney, "Path Dependence in Historical Sociology," *Theory and Society* 29 (2000), 526-7.
12. I am using "neo-classical" here in the same sense as Terry Moe, "The New Economics of Organization," *American Journal of Political Science* 28, no.4; or Douglass North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (New York, 1990), 3-6.
13. William R. Schonfield, "Political Parties: The Functional Approach and the Structural Alternative," *Comparative Politics* 15, no.4 (1983), 477-99.
14. Duverger (see note 4); Otto Kirchheimer, "The Transformation of West European Party Systems," in *Political Parties and Political Development*, eds. J. LaPalombara and M. Weiner (Princeton, 1966); Leon Epstein, *Political Parties in Western Democracies* (New York, 1967); Panebianco (see note 4); Katz and Mair (see note 5).
15. Kirchheimer (see note 12).
16. See the discussion in Downs (see note 2), 103-113.
17. Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* (Cambridge, 1970).
18. Herbert Kitschelt, "Austrian and Swedish Social Democrats in Crisis: Party Strategy and Organization in Corporatist Regimes," *Comparative Political Studies* 27, no.1 (1994): 23.
19. This interpretation of postwar policy is, however, debated among historians and contradicts the SPD's official, post-Godesberg mythology For orthodox accounts see Suzanne Miller, "Der Weg zum Godesberger Grundsatzprogramm," in *Sozialdemokratie als Lebenssinn*, ed. S. Miller (Bonn, 1995), 297-305; Helmut Köser, *Die Grundsatzdebatte in der SPD von 1945/46 bis 1958/59* (Ph.D. diss., Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, 1972); Peter Lösche and Franz Walter, *Die SPD: Klassenpartei, Volkspartei, Quotenpartei* (Darmstadt, 1992); and Douglas Chalmers, *The Social Democratic Party of Germany* (New Haven, 1964). For unorthodox perspectives, see Heinz-Gerd Hofschen, Erich Ott, Hans Karl Rupp, *SPD im Widerspruch* (Cologne, 1974); Harold Kent Schellenger, *The SPD in the Bonn Republic* (The Hague, 1968).
20. On the hierarchical structure of the pre-1933 SPD see Julius Leber, *Ein Mann geht seinen Weg* (Berlin, 1952) and Fritz Bieligk, "Die Entwicklung der sozialdemokratischen Organisation in Deutschland," in *Die Organisation im Klassenkampf: Die Probleme der politischen Organisation der Arbeiterklass,* Fritz Bieligk, Ernst Eckstein, Otto Jenssen, Kurt Laumann, Helmut Wagner_(Berlin, 1931).
21. Vorstand der Sozial Demokratischen Partei Deutschlands, *Jahrbuch 1948-9*, (Göttingen 1947) 106.
22. Lewis J. Edinger, *Kurt Schumacher: A Study in Personality and Political Behavior* (Stanford, 1965), 105; Ulrich Lohmar, *Innerparteiliche Demokratie* (Stuttgart, 1963), 65-6; Klaus Schütz, "Die Sozialdemokratie in Nachkriegsdeutschland," in *Parteien in der Bundesrepublik; Studien zur Entwicklung der deutschen Parteien bis zur Bundestagswahl 1953*, (Stuttgart, 1955), 175-6.
23. For elaboration of this struggle see Albrecht Kaden, *Einheit Oder Freiheit?_Die Wiedergründung der SPD 1945/46* (Berlin/Bonn, 1964).

24. Organisationsstatut Article 8 (1) in *Organisationsstatut, Wahlordnung, Schiedsordnung, Finanzordnung der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands Syand* 21 March 2004. Available at http://www.spd-sachsen.de/fileadmin/kunden/spd-sachsen/Dokumente/SPD-Statut-2004.pdf accessed on 11 January 2007.
25. Statut Article 15 (1), 1.
26. Article 15 (1), 2. Members of the party control commission, the party council, and up to one tenth of the members of the SPD Bundestag Fraktion and European Parliament Fraktion as well as the speakers designated by the executive may take part in party congresses as non-voting delegates. Statut Article 15(2).
27. Statut Article 23 (3-7).
28. Statut Article 23 (8-9).
29. Edinger (see note 20); Kurt Klotzbach, Der Weg zur Staatspartei (Berlin/Bonn, 1982).
30. Günter Gaus, *Staatserhaltende Opposition oder Hat die SPD kapituliert?* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1966); Udo F. Löwke, *Für den Fall, daß…* (Hannover, 1969).
31. SPD *Wahlordnung,* Article 3(5).) in Organisationsstatut, Wahlordnung, Schiedsordnung, Finanzordnung der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands Syand 21 March 2004. Available at http://www.spd-sachsen.de/fileadmin/kunden/spd-sachsen/Dokumente/SPD-Statut-2004.pdf accessed on 11 January 2007.
32. Wahlordnung Article 11 (11).
33. Ironically, Müntefering resisted giving the party chairman the right to nominate the general secretary when the position was created for him in 1999. See Bettina Gaus, "Eine geglückte Palastrevolte, in *taz* 1 November 2005, 3.
34. The opposite may also be true. An electorally unpopular leadership may be unseated by a successor generation. This is the image that surrounds Brandt's replacement of Ohlenhauer.
35. All data in this paragraph is taken from the results of the *Politbarometer* November I 2005 poll conducted 8-10 November 2005 available at http://www.forschungsgruppe.de?Aktuelles/PB_ Meldungen, accessed on 18 November 2005.
36. Matthias Platzeck, Ministerpresident of Brandenburg, assumed the SPD Chairmanship on 1 November 2005 only to resign it on 11 April 2006 for health reasons. He was succeeded by the current Chairman by Kurt Beck, SPD Ministerpresident of Rhineland Palatinate.