



The Party's Over: 17 (Societas)

Keith Sutherland

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Consider the following paradox: As the leaders of both of the main British political parties subscribed to the neoconservative doctrine on Iraq, everybody else in the birthplace of parliamentary democracy was effectively disenfranchised. Yet one of the rationales supporting the deployment of UK forces in Iraq was the wish to export democracy to the Middle East. The Emperor would appear to have mislaid his clothes (see Gordon Graham's *Case Against the Democratic State*).

Judging from the lack of ministerial resignations in the wake of the Butler enquiry, Britain is no longer a parliamentary democracy. The classical doctrine of joint and several ministerial responsibility is revealed to be a fiction, and Lord Hailsham's verdict of 'elective dictatorship' is a better assessment of the British constitution. By contrast unelected bodies like the BBC are now far more accountable for their actions. The reason of this paradox is the monopoly power of the ruling party, controlled by the Prime Minister.

The UK political party started off as a loose association of like-minded MPs. However, in recent years the tail has been wagging the dog - politicians now have no alternative but to choose and then fall in line behind a strong leader with the charisma to win elections. This book examines the historical forces that gave rise to the modern political party and questions its role in the post-ideological age. If we all now share the liberal market consensus, then what is the function of the party?

Parties in America are a lot weaker, so the book considers Graham Allen's argument to emulate the US system of checks and balances, but concludes that we would be better off reinterpreting our own constitution more literally. When the Chancellor really was a minister of the crown, every line of the budget was meticulously scrutinized. The key to the changes advocated in the book is the replacement of the Victorian ballot-box with a modern system of representation, based on the jury-selection principle.

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