

Models of Party-Interest Group Relations and the Uniqueness of the Greek Case

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ABSTRACT

There are several models of relations between political parties and interest groups. They may be categorized neatly under four headings: independence, party dependence, group dependence, and interdependence. These models have evolved historically in connection with particular ideological traditions and social conditions. Complete independence of interest groups is required both by liberalism and by anarcho-syndicalism (the latter with reference to trade unions). Party dependence on its constituent interest group(s) has been a hallmark of labor parties, catholic parties, and some agrarian parties. Group dependence is mostly associated with the Leninist conception of trade unions as “transmission belts” of the party line. Interdependence characterizes the social-democratic conception of party and trade union as the “Siamese twins” of the labor movement.

A review of these models serves to highlight the uniqueness of the current situation in Greece, where all the political parties appear to subscribe to Leninism in this area. In a process of *serial mimesis*, PASOK imitated the KKE, and ND in turn imitated PASOK. Moreover, PASOK legislation made proportional representation compulsory for most occupational interest groups. Although formally single organizations, they are actually empty shells housing a collection of competing party fractions. The resulting stalemate accommodates all the political parties and no change is in sight.

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Introduction

The question of the relationship(s) between interest groups and political parties has both theoretical and institutional significance for the operation of democracy. If, for example, interest groups are dependent on political parties that dictate their policies, a fundamental logical and temporal sequence is violated and actually *reversed*: that between interest articulation by interest groups and interest aggregation by political parties. Moreover, a deficit of representation is created, insofar as the actual interests of the group members are ignored and sacrificed.

Although noted from the start (Almond 1958: 274-278; Almond and Powell 1966: 79), half a century ago, this crucial question has been strangely neglected until recently. Formal or informal links between parties and interest groups can hardly go unnoticed and are generally known. Nevertheless, their implications are effectively ignored to a surprising degree. In Greece, for example, the mass media routinely report on demonstrations by “the farmers” or “the pensioners” even when it is (or becomes) known that these involve minute minorities orchestrated by the Communist Party (KKE).

Such neglect is even less justified in a scientific context. Discussions of both pluralism and corporatism have typically assumed interest groups to be essentially autonomous collective actors, pursuing their own distinct strategies. In the case of pluralism, this assumption apparently stemmed from the American experience, which has permeated and even shaped all relevant theoretical discussions. In the case of corporatism, on the other hand, the issue of autonomy was usually posed with reference to the state, but not political parties as such—even though political parties, after all, are the more or less transient managers of the democratic state. However, *all* the actual cases that inspired the discussions of so-called neo-corporatism were

characterized by close links between political parties and occupational interest groups, especially (but not exclusively) trade unions. The supreme irony involves Austria—a paragon of corporatism but also the most extreme case in Europe (with contemporary Greece) of strictly partisan alignments in interest-group politics (Müller 1996: 76-79). The linkage between such alignments and corporatism seems to have been “discovered” (Kitschelt 1994; Kunkel and Pontusson 1998) only after corporatism had gone out of fashion—both in theory and in practice.

Far greater sensitivity to the problem of party-group relationships was demonstrated in Europe and especially in France, where this problem manifested itself in the most extreme way because of the erstwhile large French Communist Party (PCF). Jean Meynaud, the French pioneer on interest groups, distinguished and discussed at some length five types of situation (Meynaud 1962: 123-8):

1. Political neutrality of the interest group.
2. Interest group support to particular individuals irrespective of party.
3. Privileged links between the interest group and a particular party.
4. Creation of political parties by interest groups.
5. Submission of interest groups to political parties.

Along similar lines, Maurice Duverger distinguished four possible situations (Duverger 1968: 455-8):

1. No links or only occasional contacts between interest group and political party.
2. Interest group subordinate to political party, whether formally or in fact.
3. Political party subordinate to interest group, whether formally or in fact.
4. Egalitarian cooperation between interest group and political party, whether on an ad hoc or on a permanent basis.

The two typologies essentially coincide and may be merged into one, once Meynaud's second type of situation is omitted, since it refers to individual politicians and not to parties. Another correction involves the case of occasional or ad hoc contacts between interest group and political party, which appears twice in Duverger's typology (under 1 and 4). It properly belongs only to the first type of situation.

Although this typology appears easy to apply, in practice the visible organizational links between interest groups and political parties do not prejudge the answer to the question "who controls whom." The same is true of *overlapping leadership* between interest group and political party. Obviously influenced by the French communist example, Duverger emphasizes that overlapping leadership is the most common method whereby a political party controls an interest group (Duverger 1968: 455-456). In typical "front" organizations, only certain key offices are sufficient for secure party control, such as those of the Secretary and/or the Treasurer. More glorified and visible positions, like that of the President, are reserved for prestigious personalities who do not belong to the party, and may even ignore the actual extent of party control. The so-called peace movement is a notorious example in this respect.

Nevertheless, a high degree of overlap in leadership, by itself, does not necessarily entail party control over the interest group. It may also be compatible with a symbiotic division of labor between the two. The question itself of "party control" may be meaningless insofar as what is involved is a single political elite controlling both the political party and the interest group(s) which make up the broader "movement." A case in point is the social-democratic conception of the labor movement. In the last analysis, the question of control depends on the type of party and especially on its ideology, which also dictates the direction of control.

Four Historical Models

Several models of relations between political parties and interest groups may be categorized neatly under four headings (which correspond to Duverger's typology): independence, group dependence, party dependence, and interdependence. They were formulated, elaborated, and debated mostly with reference to trade unions but can be readily generalized to any kind of interest group.

A. Independence

With no irony or paradox intended, this model may be simply dubbed "anarcho-liberal." On this particular point, there is indeed an undeniable coincidence between the dictates of liberalism (shared by modern conservatism) and those of anarchism or, at least, the version known as "anarcho-syndicalism."

Both party intervention in the internal affairs of interest groups and the reverse (group intervention in party affairs) are clearly improper and even unthinkable in the context of liberalism. This point should require no further elaboration. What has often been debated is the ideological bias of pluralist, structural-functional, or systemic approaches which have implicitly and uncritically incorporated the liberal assumption of independence between interest groups and political parties.

The lesser-known case of anarcho-syndicalism requires some explanation. Like anarchism in general, it rejects all parties, as actual or future managers of the state. In contrast, it regards trade unions not only as fighting organizations in the actual society, but also as precursors of a future social organization free of state violence.

This is precisely the conception enshrined in the famous Charter of Amiens, adopted there in 1906 by the French labor confederation CGT. The Charter proclaims the complete separation of trade unions from political parties. All the salaried must belong to the trade union, as their basic organization. They remain free to participate

in other organizations as well, according to their philosophical or political beliefs, as long as they *don't* introduce these beliefs into the union. For its part, the union fights capital and does not concern itself with political parties (the text e.g. in Capdevielle and Mouriaux 1976: 13-14).

Later the French CGT became communist, and anarcho-syndicalism developed mostly in neighboring Spain, until it was crushed in the Civil War. In France, nonetheless, what was retained from the Amiens Charter was its immediate practical implication, in the concrete doctrine of the “incompatibility of mandates” (*incompatibilité des mandats*). According to it, no one may hold union and party office simultaneously. In France, this doctrine has been strictly adhered to by CGT-FO, which split from the CGT in 1947 also over this issue. It has also been respected by the CFDT, despite its links to the socialist PS. Supreme irony, only the communist CGT has continued to violate this principle blatantly, even though it has never repudiated the Amiens Charter as a sacred text of its past. Other communists, however, like the Italians, did adopt the incompatibility of mandates.

B. Group Dependence

The most notorious and brutal doctrinal foundation of this model is condensed in Lenin's classic phrase about trade unions as mere “transmission belts” (or “mechanisms”) of the party line to the masses (the text e.g. in Capdevielle and Mouriaux 1976: 15-16). This is therefore the Leninist or communist model, which has been endured not only by trade unions but also by every kind of organization worldwide, especially in communist regimes. After the collapse of communism, very few examples survive in Europe (France, Portugal, Greece, Cyprus).

C. Party Dependence

This model characterizes parties of extraparliamentary origin and especially “indirect” parties, in Duverger’s terminology. These are founded outside parliament by preexisting (mostly occupational) organizations, which jointly constitute the party subsequently. By virtue of their membership in these organizations, individuals also become party members. Hence the designation “indirect” party and the reference to “collective membership” in it. Historically, there have been three types of such parties (cf. Almond 1958: 277):

a) The Labor Party

The best-known example is of course the British Labour Party, founded and constituted mainly by the trade unions. The British model was emulated, to a larger or smaller extent, in Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, as well as Canada. As their names themselves suggest, two Scandinavian parties came close to the same model: the Norwegian Labor Party and the Swedish Social Democratic Labor Party. Nevertheless, they were not founded originally by the trade unions, and union collective membership was limited to the local level until it was abolished in the 1990s (Allern et al. 2007: 613-614).

b) The Catholic Party

Social catholicism in the late 19th century did not lead only to the creation of catholic trade unions and occupational organizations in general. In at least two countries (Belgium and Austria), its extension was the constitution of an “indirect” political party by these catholic organizations. Social catholicism essentially transferred to modern capitalist society the organic conception of three estates that the Catholic Church had elaborated and blessed in the medieval feudal society (Ossowski

1963: 58-65). In place of the three medieval *estates* (clergy, nobility, and commoners), there are now three basic social *classes* (bourgeois, farmers, and workers), always in “organic” (hence mutual and inescapable) interdependence, which demands the peaceful resolution of conflicts between them. This conception is embodied in the very structure of the indirect catholic party.

Thus, the Belgian Catholic Party was constituted until World War II by the catholic organizations of the “estates” (*standen*). In Austria, the same conception was first embodied in the state corporatism of the short-lived authoritarian regime (*Ständestaat*) of Dollfuss (1934-38). In 1945, the (re)constitution of the catholic Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) implemented the selfsame conception, which had the advantage of a tradition untainted by the Nazi past. Accordingly, first the three basic organizations (*Bünde*) were founded—for farmers (*Bauernbund*), for businessmen (*Wirtschaftsbund*), and for blue-collar and white-collar workers (*Arbeiter- und Angestelltenbund*)—and only then did they jointly constitute the party.

In contrast, the new *christian-democratic* model after World War II in Italy and Germany implied the structure of a “direct” mass party, unaffected by the parallel existence of christian-democratic occupational organizations in Italy, like the labor confederation CISL and the farmer organization *Coldiretti* (Morlino 1991). Today, only the Austrian ÖVP remains captive of the original catholic model—hence captive also of the *interests* articulated by its three constitutive organizations. The addition of three more *Bünde* (for women, youth, and seniors) in the 1970s was essentially a compromise postponing the long overdue transformation of the ÖVP into a normal “direct” party indefinitely—despite widespread dissatisfaction and electoral decline (Leitner and Pleschberger 1992).

c) The Agrarian Party

Without comparable doctrinal elaboration, this is a type of party founded by preexisting farmer organizations in order to provide direct and authentic representation to peasant interests. Among agrarian parties, the best known examples of such origins are Scandinavian. Sweden stands out, also because until 1865 farmers were entitled to separate parliamentary representation as a “fourth” estate, beside the clergy, the nobility, and the burghers (Østerud 1978: 204-212 and 227-264). Another example, from Western Canada, became world-famous thanks to the doctoral dissertation of S. M. Lipset (Lipset 1968).

D. *Interdependence*

Interdependence implies cooperation and complementarity on an equal and permanent basis. This is essentially the social-democratic model of relations between trade union and party. It assumes their everlasting interdependence, according to an ideally clear division and mutual recognition of distinct roles and jurisdictions. In this traditional conception, a single social-democratic “Movement” has two linked but distinct branches: the party and the union(s). Their organic interdependence has been captured and condensed in colorful expressions like “one body, two arms” (in Norway) or “the Siamese twins of the labor movement” in an unbeatable formulation by the Austrian leader Victor Adler. It is based on the notion that Siamese twins have distinct personalities but—in principle—cannot be separated and survive the separation.

Obviously, we are very far from the soulless and mechanical image of transmission belts. It is, therefore, quite inappropriate and eventually misleading to generalize Adler’s analogy and speak of “Siamese twins” in the catholic and even in the communist case (Ebbinghaus 1995: 70). In the social-democratic conception,

overlapping leadership does not have the same consequences as in the Leninist case. It may merely reflect the cohesion of a single elite at the helm of a single “Movement.”

Nowadays, this originally social-democratic model may be readily applicable to *every* case where an interest group of *any* kind (occupational, but also religious or ethnic) has a permanent or “privileged” relationship with a particular political party.

In conclusion, out of the four historical models outlined above, only two appear relevant for western democracies in the future: independence and interdependence.

The Greek Anomaly

Apart from its theoretical and historical interest, the preceding summary review of four models serves to highlight the Greek anomaly. Whereas almost everywhere Leninism appears destined for the museum (if not “the dustbin of History”), in contemporary Greece *all* political parties appear to be Leninist in the area of relations between political parties and interest groups! All the parties follow the Leninist model, seeking to transform interest groups and specifically occupational interest groups into “transmission belts” of their policies.

This is why special party organizations operate in practically *every* occupational interest group, large or small. They are called “*parataxeis*” in Greek, which may be loosely translated as “camps.” In Austrian usage, they would be called “fractions” as in *Fraktion Sozialistischer Gewerkschafter*, the organization of trade unionists belonging to the socialist SPÖ (Müller 1996: 77). Until a better one is found, this term (“fractions”) will also be used here. To advertise and prove their authentic party provenance, the “fractions” belonging to the two major Greek parties use variations of the same root acronym (PASK- for PASOK, DAK- for ND). For the even less

sophisticated, they also prefer to use the distinctive party colors (green for PASOK, blue for ND).

From the preceding analysis, it also becomes clear that ND constitutes the biggest oddity. The KKE, at least, remains unambiguously true to its origins—in this as in every other respect. For its part, PASOK also remains captive of its original decision to imitate Leninism in organizational matters. But ND? Only a sort of *serial mimesis* explains the Greek anomaly. From its inception, following Greece's return to democracy in 1974, PASOK imitated the KKE. Subsequently, ND imitated PASOK—hence also the KKE! Smaller parties have been desperately trying to imitate the larger ones. On the part of ND, after its electoral defeat in 1981, the decision to imitate PASOK was apparently dictated by the practical calculation that the adversary could be confronted only on his own ground and with his own weapons (Mavrogordatos 1997: 16 and 22). This worked up to a point—but no further.

Otherwise, the imitation of PASOK and the KKE by ND has absolutely no theoretical or ideological foundation or justification. No liberal or conservative party, like ND, organizes its own “fractions” nor presents its own party tickets in the internal elections of occupational interest groups—even less of trade unions. Only christian-democratic parties, with a tradition of social catholicism, maintain their own groups of trade unionists, as in Germany, or even their own trade unions, as in Belgium and in Italy (as long as there was a party). But ND does not partake of this tradition and is not entitled ideologically (even theologically) to copy it selectively. Moreover, only one catholic party—an “indirect” party at that—maintains today “fractions” in interest groups, like ND. This is the Austrian ÖVP. But ND is not and cannot ever become a catholic party, even less an “indirect” one!

More generally, among western democracies only Austria presents some analogies with Greece in this area. This highlights, once again, the Greek anomaly since the two countries have little in common otherwise. Austria and Greece seem to be the only countries in the European Union where there are official party organizations (“fractions”) and party lists in *single* occupational interest groups—not separate interest groups by party orientation as in Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy etc. In Austria, however, these single interest groups are “Chambers” (*Kammer*), that is, public institutions with compulsory membership (cf. Kunkel and Pontusson 1998: 2). In the end, there is absolutely nothing like the Greek situation, which includes not only compulsory chambers but also voluntary associations.

Denial and Derision

An earlier version of this paper appeared in the most authoritative journal published by ND (Mavrogordatos 2001). Since this is the Greek party that constitutes the biggest oddity, it seemed logical to present the argument to its cadres, in the hope of provoking some debate or clarification, if not correction.

Sadly, the only reaction was plain denial. Publication of my article was delayed until the foremost party functionary in the civil-service unions could concoct a response, which was published in the same issue of the journal (Kollias 2001). In it, he absurdly argued that ND organizations (“fractions”) in trade unions were completely independent from the party.

This official party denial was soon ridiculed by routine press reports. In February 2002, the disciplinary council of ND openly expelled four party cadres because they had not joined the ND lists in *chamber* elections but had collaborated, instead, with PASOK supporters (newspaper *Eleftherotypia*, 9 February 2002). Five months later,

another party cadre was demoted for the same reason in connection with the elections of the bar association of the town of Veria, while three more were reprimanded for disobeying the party line in the union elections of the postal savings bank (*Eleftherotypia*, 27 July 2002). No need to multiply the examples.

More generally, the strictly party character of the “fractions” (*parataxeis*) within occupational interest groups is openly acknowledged. Suffice it to mention only the most blatant recent instance. During the PASOK leadership contest in the fall of 2007, the presidents of *all* the peak occupational organizations (except big business) came out publicly, in an unprecedented joint press conference, in favor of George A. Papandreou (newspaper *Kathimerini*, 17 October 2007). They did so not as spokesmen of the organizations over which they ostensibly preside, but only as top PASOK cadres and members of the party’s National Council (the renamed Central Committee). The five were the presidents of GSEE (labor), ADEDY (civil servants), PASEGES (agricultural cooperatives), GESASE (farmer associations), and GSEVEE (small business). Their support was most probably decisive in securing the party leadership for G. A. Papandreou—and points to an unintended and unforeseen development, which may be aptly called the nemesis of Leninism.

The Nemesis of Leninism

The two major Greek parties (PASOK and ND) imitated the Leninist model like apprentice sorcerers. They lack the preconditions for it, and especially the monolithic party cohesion and discipline that it presupposes. (Only the KKE has that.) Consequently, sooner or later, the (in)famous “transmission belts” begin to move *in reverse*. They no longer transmit the party line to the interest groups concerned. Instead, they transmit the pressure of organized interests to the party. The special

party organizations (“fractions”) created as agents of the party inside the interest groups are gradually transformed into representatives and spokesmen of the interest groups inside the party and its governing bodies—a situation appropriate only to “indirect” parties like the Austrian ÖVP. Such is the dark side of the “catchall” character that both major Greek parties boast of.

This is inevitably the end result of nationwide party competition when it is transposed to the interior life of even the smallest association. The competitors (the political parties) may be the same everywhere, but the issues are not. They differ from case to case, according to the particular interests of each group. Nonetheless, it is around these particular issues that party competition within the interest groups eventually revolves, degenerating into constant outbidding on the part of the parties and their cadres. In conjunction with the relatively small difference in votes that victory in the parliamentary elections requires (thanks to the peculiar Greek electoral system), this situation breeds a vicious circle of mutual dependence between the parties and their supporters *in each and every interest group*. The parties become captives of the particular interests that their cadres serve in every single organization. No political party can afford to withdraw unilaterally. More concretely, the parties are condemned to perpetually help and “subsidize” the performance of their cadres in the respective internal elections—with money but mostly with favorable and binding policy commitments. Conversely, when in government, the political parties are deprived of the option to deal decisively with *any* interest group and its blackmail, if this means abandoning and sacrificing their own cadres within it as well. In early 1990, the shortlived Zolotas cabinet offered the ludicrous spectacle of a government supported by all parties, yet powerless in its confrontation with the crippling garbage-disposal strike engineered and led by their own union cadres (Mavrogordatos 1993).

Once “transmission belts” begin to move in reverse, it is no longer the case that the actual interests of group members are jeopardized. Instead, it is *interest aggregation* by the political parties that becomes problematic, if not entirely unworkable. Instead of coming under party control, interest groups become even more uncontrollable.

No Prospect of Change

This situation in Greece has been promoted and institutionalized by PASOK after it first won power in 1981 (Mavrogordatos 1988 and 1993). Although largely unnoticed in most studies, PASOK’s uniform project concerning organized interests was undoubtedly the most consistent and global of its policies, both in design and in implementation. It is practically the only policy area where initial intentions were entirely fulfilled and where no reversal or correction of policy has occurred subsequently—down to the present.

Although proclaimed and advertised under an irresistible label (that some continue to take at face value), “democratization” by PASOK was not confined to eradicating past abusive practices of conservative governments and corrupt labor bosses. It actually meant the wholesale radical transformation of interest-group structures and statutes through government legislation regulating even the minutest details and leaving absolutely no freedom of choice to those concerned. Conformity was also imposed by court decisions appointing provisional executives controlled by PASOK. The most brutal judicial intervention occurred in 1985, when seven PASOK unionists elected on the executive of the labor confederation (GSEE) disobeyed the party line and were summarily expelled from the party. By resigning from the GSEE executive,

the remaining PASOK members then provided a pretext for the court to appoint a new “provisional” executive restoring the majority of PASOK cadres obedient to the party.

Whereas state intervention through legislation and compliant judges perpetuated past practices and an unbroken tradition of *state* corporatism, the single most novel and radical element of PASOK policy was the imposition of proportional representation (PR) as the universal and compulsory system for most occupational interest groups, including even the compulsory chambers for businessmen. Eventually, only the voluntary associations of “big” business (banks, shipping, industry, retail chains etc.) remained unaffected by PASOK legislation.

With these few exceptions, practically all internal elections of Greek occupational interest groups are contested by thinly disguised party lists, which gain proportional representation on the various governing bodies, reproducing more or less faithfully the parliamentary party spectrum. Although they remain formally single organizations, these interest groups have become actually empty shells, housing a collection of competing party groups or “fractions” which mostly act on their own. This fragmentation is most pronounced in trade unions and in recognized student associations (those legally entitled to represent students on university bodies).

When it imposed PR on most occupational interest groups in the 1980s, PASOK was counting on having a majority of its own everywhere, in a spirit of sweeping populist “*Gleichschaltung*” (Mavrogordatos 1993: 56-58). Otherwise, a majority could be safely obtained in alliance with the traditional Left (comprising the KKE and the Eurocommunists, later SYN). In those early days, ND supporters were to be hounded and excluded completely—at least from any executive office.

Since then, however, party strategies and party strengths have changed considerably. Belatedly, ND imitated its opponents and organized its own supporters

into “fractions” everywhere—abandoning, consequently, its original opposition to PR. For its part, the KKE quit the alliance with PASOK, joined forces with ND on various occasions, and managed to impose, eventually, the ultimate logical extension of PR: a proportional distribution of interest-group executive offices among all party “fractions” according to their electoral strength. Whichever “fraction” comes first (i.e., wins a plurality or even a majority) takes the association’s President, whichever comes second takes the Secretary-General, and so on.

Nonetheless, the KKE subsequently formulated and implemented a different strategy in the labor confederation (GSEE). It refused to participate henceforth in the GSEE executive, without leaving the confederation. Instead, exactly ten years ago it reorganized and renamed its own trade-union “fraction” as PAME. Ever since then, PAME has operated as a de facto rival confederation, denouncing the official GSEE leadership (composed of PASOK, ND, and SYN unionists) as sold-out to the government and the employers.

The KKE thus has it both ways. On the one hand, it is free of responsibility for official union actions and can sponsor the most irresponsible (and violent) actions on its own. On the other hand, it remains within the institutional framework of the official unions and can continue eating its cake in the form of subsidies and other benefits that state corporatism generously provides. If it left this framework to create a new labor confederation, the cake would be withdrawn and political isolation would ensue. Moreover, the PASOK legislation does not permit organizational forms that the KKE prefers, like industrial unions. Consequently, the attraction of a potential new labor confederation is considerably diminished by the fact that the KKE would not be allowed to organize it freely and according to its own principles.

Furthermore, the KKE does not have to fear retaliation and sanctions on the part of the other parties (PASOK, ND, SYN) for its offensive, divisive, and disruptive behavior. They obviously fear that the KKE, if expelled or forced to walk out of the official unions, might become even more disruptive and unpredictable. It might also become stronger.

In general, the party penetration of most occupational interest groups has resulted in a protracted stalemate, stagnation, apathy, and eventual delegitimation of the interest groups themselves. The latter is especially pronounced in the case of trade unions and agricultural organizations. Nevertheless, the stalemate accommodates all the political parties and no change is in sight. This may seem odd, considering that the process originated with PASOK over the vociferous opposition of ND. It was PASOK that forced civil society into its bureaucratically prefabricated mould, in truly Procrustean fashion. Eventually, however, all the political parties acquired a vested interest in perpetuating the penetration and domination of interest groups by external party machines, which is enshrined in PR (Mavrogordatos 1993: 60-61). In this sense, all the major Greek parties together maintain a gag on civil society.

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