

BOOK REVIEW

On Parties, Party Systems and Democracy: Selected Writings of Peter Mair*

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(MAIR, Peter. *On parties, party systems and democracy: selected writings of Peter Mair*. Edited by Ingrid van Biezen. Colchester: ECPR Press, 2014)

I still have memories of the impact that caused me reading the book 'Identity, Competition and Electoral Availability: the Stabilisation of Europe Electorates', 1885-1995, by Stefano Bartolini and Peter Mair (1990), while still doing my doctorate. Today, I consider it one of the most elegant and well-made books of contemporary Political Science. And the reason is simple: the rare combination of a detailed conceptual discussion - particularly the concept of cleavage - and a dense empirical research. The authors collected data from a hundred years of electoral history of the countries of Western Europe, and through the use of an instrument, which today seems relatively simple (volatility index variations) showed that, different from what was supported by ordinary studies, there was a tendency to stability of partisan conflict in these countries, reinforcing the thesis of 'freezing' of party systems, suggested by S. Lipset and S. Rokkan.

I gradually became an avid reader of books and articles published by Peter Mair. I learned to appreciate his clear texts, his ability to gather data and to present them directly, his appreciation for the conceptual discussion and, above all, his enormous ability to analyze the changes in the modern political structure. For that reason, I regretted his untimely death in 2011, months after the celebration of his sixtieth birthday.

In the book 'On parties, Party system and Democracy' (2014) the political scientist Ingrid van Biezen, one of the main Mair's collaborators in the final phase of his

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life, made an exquisite collection of his texts. Unlike other books-tributes, in which the publication of new or little known texts of the author is privileged, Biezen's book selected from the best that Peter Mair wrote, including books extracts. The 25 texts reproduced in 'On parties, Party system and Democracy' were originally published between 1979 and 2009.

In addition to an introduction where Biezen makes an excellent summary of Mair's work, the book includes a touching statement signed jointly by Hans Daalder and Stefano Bartolini. Daalder was advisor and one of the main influences of Mair. Bartolini wrote alongside him 'Identity, Competition and Electoral Availability' and was a great friend and intellectual partner.

The book is organized into six parts, reproducing Mair's main areas of interest and research. Part 01 brings together two texts on comparative politics. In 'Concept and Concept Formation' (2008) Mair emphasizes the importance of a careful activity of conceptualization before "diving" in quantifying: "As noted, we should begin our research by addressing the 'what-is' question: only later, if at all, do we address the 'how-much' question. That is, we need to know what we are going to measure and compare before we begin with the measurement and the comparison" (MAIR, 2008, p. 73). Those who know his writings, recognize that he was a faithful doer of this premise. Part 02 brings together texts devoted to the policy of individual countries, his own country (Ireland) and the Netherlands. Although none of the provisions of this part especially deal with electoral systems, it is interesting to note that Mair was one of the first authors to study the 'single transferable vote', the complex electoral system used in his country. Part 05 compiles texts dealing with the European Union. Although this was an area in which the author worked less, he is the author (along with M. Gallagher and M. Laver) of an influential manual of European comparative politics: 'Representative Government: Institutions, Parties and Government' (five editions published between 1992 and 2011).

The central themes of Peter Mair's work are treated in Parts 03 (party systems) and 04 (political parties). Among the articles in these two sections, I highlight the written with Richard Katz, 'Changing model of party organization and party democracy: the emergence of the cartel party' (1995), who would become the most influential work on political parties since its publication. Katz and Mair propose the term 'cartel party' to call a new type of party that emerged in Europe from the 1970s. The cartel party marks

the change from a context in which the party was a highly representative organization of society to a context in which it would become a strongly anchored organization in the state. Parties lose members and support from public opinion, and no longer receive resources from their members, depending on state subsidies, and increasingly having their organization controlled by party law.

Compared to the period in which the mass and catch-all parties were dominant, the era of cartel party introduces a profound change in the nature of partisan conflict and electoral control:

Central to the earlier models was the idea of alternation in office - not only were there some parties that were clearly 'in' while others were clearly 'out', but the fear of being thrown out of office by the voters was also seen as the major incentive for politicians to be responsive to the citizenry. In the cartel model, on the other hand, none of major parties is ever definitively 'out'. As a result, there is an increased sense in which electoral democracy may be seen as a means by which the rulers control the ruled, rather than the other way around. As party programmers become more similar, and as campaigns are in any case oriented more towards agreed goals rather than contentious means, there is a shrinkage in degree to which electoral outcomes can determine government actions (MAIR, 1995, p. 409).

Part 06 contains articles on the relationship between parties and democracy. These texts were published between 2002 and 2009 and show the theme that would mobilize Peter Mair in the last decade of his life. Two texts, the most normative of the book, should be highlighted. The first is 'Ruling the void: the holing of western democracy' (2006) - that would be the embryo for a book with the same-title published posthumously. In the article, Mair reveals his concern with the fact that parties are becoming organizations that function as appendages of the state, losing their functions of representation and electoral expression.

The second is 'Representative vs. responsible government' (2009), where the author defends that the great contribution that parties gave to democracy was to simultaneously ensure a representative and governmental dimension; that is: "Parties gave voice to citizenry. Second, parties governed" (MAIR, 2009, p. 581). This contribution would be threatened by the fact that the state has captured the representative dimension of parties. "In contemporary democracies, the two functions that were once combined by party have begun to grow apart, with many of today's party downplaying, or being forced to downplay, their representative role, and enhancing, or being forced to enhance, their governing role. In other words, as part of process by

which parties moved their centers of gravity from civil society to state" (MAIR, 2009, p. 582).

Reading 'On parties, party systems and democracy' produced me the curious sensation that Peter Mair's style of making political science is increasingly uncommon today. His form of argumentation and presentation probably seems at odds with the new comparativist wave, which makes wide use of sophisticated statistical models and formal models.

The book segment that reunites Mair's texts has 448 pages. In these pages, we can find dozens of tables and a few graphics. In general, the data are presented in a very basic way: percentage of votes and seats; changes of votes between elections; average votes per period; 'volatility index'. Only in an article he uses a multivariate method (linear regression). For new generations of political scientists, the book leaves one question, which sounds paradoxical: how was it possible to leave a contribution as relevant to the understanding of the parties and transformations in contemporary politics as Mair's, using data in such a simple way?

Translated by Cabo Verde