

Parliamentary Party Cohesion and the Scarcity of Sanctions in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives (1991-1995)

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'[O]ver the years, I have learned what so many have recognized before me, that Parliament is bigger than any of its members and that its honor as an institution far surpasses any consideration of party advantage. When the division bell rings tonight, it will toll for all of us.'
Sir Henry d'Avigdor-Goldsmid, MP ²

The classical model of parliament has the individual representative at its centre. Accordingly and constitutionally, members of parliament invariably represent the whole nation. They tend to vote, unconcerned by instruction or consultation. Constitutionally, members of parliament are invariably committed, not to charges or directives, but to their conscience only. Members of parliament pass judgment over the people's crucial questions, from a deeper understanding, a better knowledge, a greater strength of character. This conception has, however, long ceased to be an accurate or fruitful description of the functioning of the democratic process ³, even if parliamentary thought is still shaded by remnants of preceding models. ⁴ Conceding parliaments have recently gained in importance and strength both due to a more extensive dispersion throughout the world ⁵ and invigorated committee structures ⁶, it holds true political parties, not parliament, determine public policy. Parliamentary proceedings are highly ritualized. A Member of Parliament is both an individual and a member of a party.

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2 R. JACKSON, *Rebels and Whips. Analysis of Dissension, Discipline and Cohesion in British Political Parties*. London, Macmillan, 1968, p. 170.

3 E.N. SULEIMAN, Introduction. In: E.N. SULEIMAN, *Parliaments and Parliamentarians in Democratic Politics*. London, Holmes and Meier, 1986, p. 3.

4 W. DEWACHTER, Het parlement: vijf modellen, n functies. In: W. DEWACHTER, I. THOMAS, S. DEPAUW, *Afscheid van het laatste dubbelparlement*. Louvain, Acco, 1997, p. 26.

5 G. COPELAND, S. PATTERSON, *Parliaments in the Modern World: Changing Institutions*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1994, p. 1.

6 L.D. LONGLEY, R.H. DAVIDSON, Parliamentary Committees: Changing Perspectives on Changing Institutions. *Journal of Legislative Studies*. 4, 1998, 1, p. 5, K. STRØM, Parliamentary Committees in European Democracies. *Journal of Legislative Studies*. 4, 1998, 1, p. 47, G. COPELAND, S. PATTERSON, o.c., pp. 10-11.

Although parliament was conceptualized initially in the absence of political parties, party formation springs inherently from the proceedings of representation. The simple model of MPs as representatives of the people is too straightforward.⁷ Political parties necessarily hold the key to both MP's election and any meaningful way of performing his parliamentary duties. Both under conditions of proportional and majority representation, members of parliament are elected foremost on the party label or on the merits of the party leader. Parties present themselves the electors' watchdog, to ensure MPs faithfully observe the party manifesto, they were elected on.⁸ In addition, the tabling of a private member's bill, the tabling of a question an address of the House or the Committee is subject to the parliamentary party's permission. Moreover, parliamentary government rests upon a stable majority in the legislature. Granting the investiture and the support of government is a quintessential task of the legislature in parliamentary government. Any lack of discipline in the majority parties may result in the fall of the cabinet. Any shade of internal squabbles in opposition may seriously endanger its electoral chances of ousting the cabinet. Former minister, François Périn, attests straightforwardly:

*'The MP, who breaks with vote discipline in the name of parliament's, as well as his own independence, is often a hypocrite who hides behind an apparently noble alibi to commit an act of disloyalty that can endanger the stability of the system.'*⁹

The expression of an individual point of view is thus a luxury few members can afford. Divisions incessantly demonstrate highly cohesive, closed blocs, exhibiting a near military discipline. Division upon division, at times more than two hundred a day, members vote consistently with parliamentary party directives. Members vote 'en bloc', chat 'en bloc', even boo 'en bloc'.¹⁰

Party discipline is, in fact, to such an extent taken for granted, research has apparently become redundant.¹¹ In spite of parliaments' growing salience, research into the mechanics of parliament is scarce in the Belgian context. Philip Norton's taletelling conclusion on British parliamentary research, that it is inspired and obstructed by the nature of political science¹², is particularly accurate with reference to Belgium. Since political decision-making is developed else-

7 J. THOMASSEN, M.L. ZIELONKA-GOEI, *Het parlement als volksvertegenwoordiging*. In: J. THOMASSEN, M. VAN SCHENDELEN, M.L. ZIELONKA-GOEI, *De geachte afgevaardigde... Hoe kamerleden denken over het Nederlandse parlement*. Muiderberg, Coutinho, 1992, p. 203.

8 J. THOMASSEN, M.L. ZIELONKA-GOEI, *o.c.*, p. 204.

9 F. PERIN, *Note sur le parlement et les mécanismes du pouvoir*. *Res Publica*. 31, 1989, 2, p. 165.

10 H. HAMM-BRÜCHER, *Diskussionbeitrag*. In: K. PORZNER, H. OBERRAUTER, U. THAYSEN, *40 Jahre Deutscher Bundestag: Referate und Diskussionsbeiträge der Tagung der Deutschen Vereinigung für Parlamentsfragen und der Vereinigung ehemaliger Mitglieder des Deutschen Bundestages und des Europäischen Parlaments am 8.-10. September 1989 in Bonn*. Baden Baden, Nomos, 1990, p. 136.

11 Ph. NORTON, *Dissension in the House of Commons 1974-79*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980, p. xvi.

12 Ph. NORTON, *Roles and Behavior of British MPs*. In: W.C. MÜLLER, Th. SAALFELD *Members of Parliament in Western Europe. Roles and Behavior*. London, Frank Cass, 1997, p. 17.

where¹³, there seemed little point in examining parliament. In part due to high levels of cohesion, MPs' behaviour appeared predictable and of little consequence. Moreover, dominance of a legalistic and historic approach discouraged systematic, empirical research into parliamentarians' roles and behaviour.¹⁴ Research has focused mainly on the description of the socio-demographic and political background of MPs, in addition to ideological attitudes. Few authors have focused upon intra-parliamentary behaviour, including research on attendance, interventions in plenary debates, the content of MPs' political discourse, specialisation, the use of the private member's bill and amendments, and voting behaviour. Prior research in Belgium into members' voting behaviour is at best extremely scarce.¹⁵ In well over 168 years of parliament, only three instances are known, covering parliamentary votes in only 13 years. In addition, investiture votes in parliament have been looked at for a somewhat longer period, from 1944 up until 1979.¹⁶ Perhaps due to unrelenting high levels of party cohesion, party discipline is taken for granted to such an extent, *'there is no longer any point in measuring it'*.¹⁷

In spite of regular high levels of cohesion, party discipline is, however, by no means a foregone conclusion. Party directives are the outcome of a persistent struggle inside the parliamentary party and party caucus. MPs tend to be exposed to a wide variety of, possibly conflicting, influences, interests, experiences, and social backgrounds. MPs tend to represent widely differing constituencies and electorates. The moment, this variety leads to differing opinions among members, a complex process of communication, negotiation, conformism, deviance and accommodation takes off.¹⁸ Party cohesion is but the product of this complex process, crinkling and crawling through parliamentary party meetings, in back-bench committees, but still more often, in hallways and dining rooms. Hence, party leadership is confronted with an incessant attempt at replacing party directives and attempts, in its turn, to keep reluctant members in line. Former Chief Whip, Edward Short, confesses:

'My mother kept ducks, and it was my daily task as a boy to drive the ducks from the river into their shed some distance away. As I drove the flock along the line in what, with more sensible creatures, would have been a quiet, orderly procession, a sudden noise or other diversion would alarm them and they would fly off towards every point of the compass.'

13 W. DEWACHTER, *Besluitvorming in politiek België*. Louvain, Acco, 1995, pp. 13-36, W. DEWACHTER, o.c., 1997, pp. 17-53.

14 L. DE WINTER, Intra- and Extra-Parliamentary Role Attitudes and Behaviour of Belgian MPs. In: W.C. MÜLLER, Th. SAALFELD, o.c., p. 128. For an overview of Belgian parliamentary research, see L. De Winter, *The Belgian Legislator*. Florence, European University Institute, 1992, pp. 46-48 and L. De Winter, o.c., 1997, pp. 151-153.

15 E. LANGERWERF, Het stemgedrag in het parlement. Onderzoek in de Kamer van volksvertegenwoordigers voor de periode 1954-65. *Res Publica*. 22, 1980, 1-2, pp. 177-188, M. VERMINCK, Consensus en oppositie in het Belgisch parlement tijdens een verkiezingsjaar. Onderzoek op basis van het stemgedrag in de Kamer van volksvertegenwoordigers in 1985. *Res Publica*. 28, 1986, pp. 475-487, M. NOOYENS, *Oppositieel en consensusgedrag in de Kamer van volksvertegenwoordigers tijdens de periode 1975-78*. Louvain, K.U.Leuven, 1987.

16 L. HOLVOET, De stemmingen over het investituurdebat in Kamer en Senaat (1944-1979). *Res Publica*. 22 1980, 1-2, pp. 35-76.

17 S.H. BEER, *Modern British Politics*. London, Faber, 1969, p. 350.

18 R. JACKSON, o.c., pp. 306-307.

Sometimes they fled for no apparent reason, perhaps for the devil of it! The utter exasperation of duck-herding can only be appreciated by someone who has experienced it. And that is how I felt as Chief Whip after five weeks with 'a safe working majority'.¹⁹

In this respect, additional research into the mechanics of party cohesion, dissension and discipline is both necessary and hazardous.

I. A Rational Choice Approach to Parliamentary Party Cohesion

The single most important impediment to a more encompassing and truly comparative scientific research into parliament (and party cohesion) is, however, the lack of a dominant paradigm. Although research makes progress unmistakably, it is more often than not, solely empiric in nature, lacking formal theory-building, eclectic and dispersed.²⁰ Hypotheses regarding the causes of party cohesion, are most often ad hoc in character and display little logical coherence.²¹ In addition, the members' veiling silence hides processes of cohesion from science's systematical observation, thus contributing to the proverbial 'segregation of those who know but do not write from those who write but do not know'. Thus, Thomas Saalfeld's influential study of the German Bundestag is apt to conclude:

'Parliamentary parties are complex creations, whose cohesion can only be explained, at the current state of research, by a great many different variables and endeavors. It will still take many laborious, little steps on the road to an all-encompassing explanation.'²²

Although party cohesion is often portrayed a result of processes of socialization in party and parliament -cohesion being the product of members' personal moral directive²³- or a result of shared interests -cohesion being the reflection of party homogeneity pertaining to social class- the most encompassing theory to date is allegedly a rational choice approach to the subject. Conceding both normativist and structural approaches have undeniably earned their merits and critics, for our purpose to demonstrate that rewards and punishments do not seem

19 E. SHORT, *Whip to Wilson*. London, Macdonald, 1989, p. 270.

20 S.C. PATTERSON, J.C. WAHLKE, Trends and Prospects in Legislative Behavior Research. In: S.C. PATTERSON, J.C. WAHLKE, *Comparative Legislative Behavior. Frontiers of Research*. London, Wiley, 1972, p. 290, G. LOEWENBERG, Comparative Legislative Research. In: S.C. PATTERSON, J.C. WAHLKE o.c., p. 5, S.S. SCHÜTTEMEYER, Vergleichende Parlamentarismusforschung. In: D. BERG-SCHLOSSER, F. MÜLLER-ROMMEL, *Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft. Ein einführendes Studienhandbuch*. Opladen, Leske und Budrich, 1992, p. 182, M.L. MEZEY, Legislatures: Individual Purpose and Institutional Performance. In: A.W. FINIFTER *Political Science: State of the Discipline II*. Washington, American Political Science Association, 1993, p. 356, L.N. RIESELBACH, The Forest for the Trees: Blazing Trails for Congressional Research. In: A.W. FINIFTER, *Political Science: State of the Discipline*. Washington, APSA, 1983, p. 178.

21 Th. SAALFELD, *Parteisoldaten und Rebellen. Fraktionen im Deutschen Bundestag 1949-1990*. Opladen, Leske und Budrich, 1995, p. 18.

22 Th. SAALFELD, o.c., p. 361.

23 E. CROWE, Consensus and Structure in Legislative Norms: Party Discipline in the House of Commons. *Journal of Politics*. 45, 1983, p. 907, M. HECHTER, *Principles of Group Solidarity*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987, pp. 20-24, E. CROWE, The Web of Authority: Party Loyalty and Social Control in the British House of Commons. *Journal of Legislative Studies*. 11, 1986, 2, p. 165.

to be the sole cement holding parliamentary parties together, we will, however, follow Michael Hechter's conclusion:

*'Although the concept of group solidarity underlies much sociological analysis, neither normative, functional, nor structural explanations provide an adequate account of it. In the first place, none of these approaches seems capable of explaining differences in the extensiveness of group obligations. In the second, none of them explains when members will honor these obligations.'*²⁴

A rational choice approach appears to be particularly well-equipped to provide insight into the parliamentary party leadership's opportunities (or lack of it) for sanctioning recalcitrant members.

In a rational choice perspective, social order is the inevitable social result of rational actors' behaviour in particular circumstances. Persons hold sets of given, consistent, transitive preferences. Confronted with conditions of scarcity, persons will opt for actions that approach with the highest efficiency, their most valued purpose.²⁵ Members of Parliament pursue a diversity of such goals. It has been claimed, MPs are merely or at least foremost interested in reelection, in saving one's bacon.²⁶ But, members cherish definite policy objectives, they want to realize, as well. In their pursuit of 'good' policy, they aim to acquire influence in the decision-making process.²⁷ Members want to leave a personal stamp on legislation.²⁸ In this perspective, information is a savored resource, but just as often, a purpose in itself. To this expertness, influence and popular support, members owe a sense of status and prestige, they revel in.²⁹ The goals, MPs seek out, thus, shape behavior in and outside parliament in a very real way.³⁰

These goals, MPs seek out, are, however, exclusively personal in nature. A core question, rational choice has turned its attention to, is how rational actors can, then, be persuaded to collective action. A shared interest in the consumption of some jointly produced good seems a necessary precondition. The more public in nature, these collective goods are, however, the more difficulties groups face in solving the production problems of allocation and coordination. In the case of a public good, shunning one's personal contribution does not in itself endanger the actual supply of goods. In addition, these free riders cannot be excluded from the consumption of purely public goods. Thus, Mancur Olson is able to conclude

²⁴ M. HECHTER, *o.c.*, 1987, p. 29.

²⁵ J. ELSTER, The Possibility of Rational Politics. In: D. HELD, *Political Theory Today*. Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991, pp. 117-118.

²⁶ J.W. KINGDON, Models of Legislative Voting. *Journal of Politics*. 39, 1977, pp. 576-577, M.P. FIORINA, *Representatives, Roll Calls, and Constituencies*. Lexington, Heath, 1974, G. COX, M. McCUBBINS, *Legislative Leviathan. Party Government in the House*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993, p. 109.

²⁷ M.L. MEZEY, *o.c.*, p. 343, G. COX, M. McCUBBINS, *o.c.*, p. 109.

²⁸ G. COX, McCUBBINS, *o.c.*, p. 109, M.L. MEZEY, *o.c.*, p. 343, R.L. HALL, Participation and Purpose in Committee Decision-Making. *American Political Science Review*. 81, 1987, p. 111.

²⁹ R.H.S. CROSSMAN, Introduction. In: W. BAGEHOT, *The English Constitution*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1995, p. 5.

³⁰ D.D. SEARING, *Westminster's World. Understanding Political Roles*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 20.

*'[...] in a large group in which no single individual's contribution makes a perceptible difference to the group as a whole, or the burden or benefit of any single member of the group, it is certain that a collective good will not be provided unless there is coercion or some outside inducements that will lead the members of the large group to act in their common interest.'*³¹

Since actors are only persuaded to group membership in order to attain certain profit, it seems the better groups are at excluding non-contributors from access to the joint group, the more likely they manage to survive.³² In this perspective, group solidarity can be viewed upon as a tax, levied in exchange for group membership and the consumption of joint goods.³³

Rational members will only observe group obligations, when the group accounts for the only way possible to attain the goals they pursue. Thus, members in their pursuit of reelection and promotion, of valued positions in parliament and government, are dependent upon their parliamentary party.³⁴ This dependence is largely determined by the means the parliamentary party has to offer and the opportunity cost of leaving the group.³⁵ The more alternative suppliers exist, the more similar substitutes exist, the lower members' dependence.³⁶ Even in view of dependence, however, members will attempt to free-ride, when given the opportunity. In remembrance of Hobbes' war of every man against every man, a solution to this dilemma is sought in the development of a central authority. The possibilities of controlling members' behavior are a result of the accuracy, which members' individual contribution to group goals can be discerned with, and the opportunities and means to sanction undesirable behavior. Members' cooperation to the party's legislative policy is, thus, forced by means of sanctions or the threat of them. By changing individuals' rewards structure, sanctions may force cohesion upon members. Sanctions may transform parliamentary parties into privileged groups, in this respect that the party leadership finds sufficient reward in the attainment of group goals to be prepared to bear the costs of supervision and control.³⁷ Social order can, thus, result from dependence and the use of sanctions. Norms and shared beliefs are but catalyses for the development of social order, not necessary or sufficient conditions.³⁸ From this point of view, parliamentary party leadership is, thus, a core determinant of parliamentary party cohesion: it is by and large the only feasible incentive to inspire ego-centered members to act in unison and provide stability to the political system.

Michael Hechter particularly stresses the importance of members' reelection goal. Since reelection is foremost determined by the electors -both in the public

31 M. OLSON, *The Logic of Collective Action. Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1965, p. 44.

32 M. HECHTER, *o.c.*, p. 39.

33 M. HECHTER, *o.c.*, p. 42.

34 M. HECHTER, *o.c.*, p. 79.

35 Th. SAALFELD, *o.c.*, pp. 172-173.

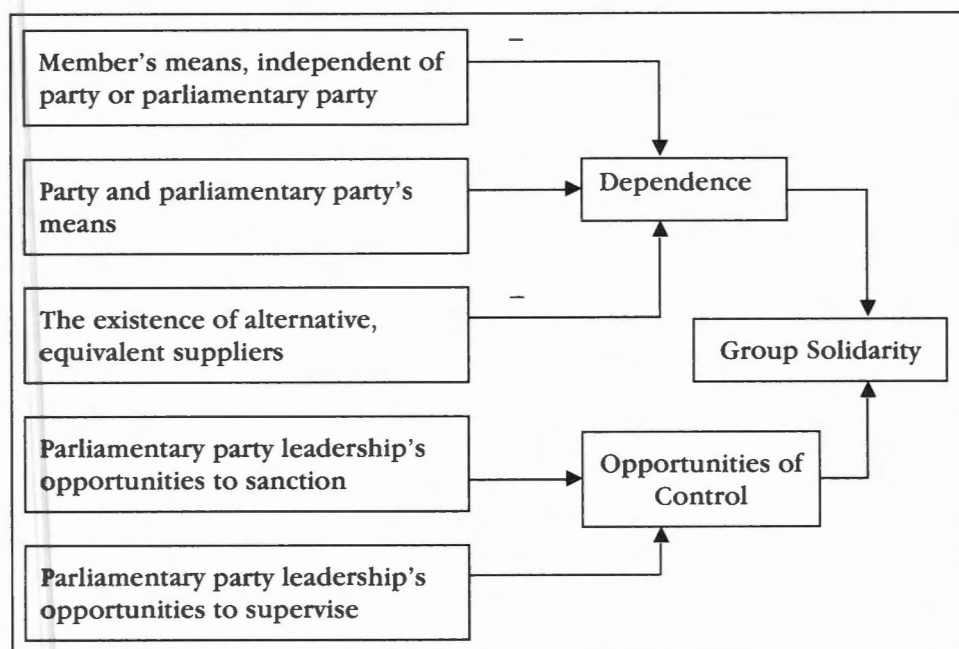
36 M. HECHTER, *o.c.*, pp. 45-47.

37 Th. SAALFELD, *o.c.*, p. 175.

38 U. ROSENTHAL, *Political Order, Rewards, Punishments and Political Stability*. Mepel, Krips Repro, 1978, pp. 30-33.

SCHEME I

A Rational Choice Theory of Group Solidarity



primaries and the actual election- Hechter like many American researchers³⁹ esteems constituency determinants of more importance than party influences. Only when divisions leave the constituency indifferent, do members turn to party directives.⁴⁰ Group solidarity in parliament, thus, dwindles when party and constituency influences tend to diverge. The electoral price, paid for party loyalty, then, surpasses benefits from group membership.⁴¹ Gary Cox and Matthew McCubbins, on the other hand, attribute party a major determinant position in parliamentary proceedings, even in the US Congress. The fact that the national party reputation, i.e. the electoral effect of the party label, is a major contributor to reelection -a point of view more consistent with European political science-, does, however, not measure up to its public good nature. The more general vote swing that ties MPs' reelection chances together is an intangible good. Persistent rebels cannot be precluded from its influence. Moreover, MPs' contributions -in and outside parliament- to this intangible party reputation are near invisible. In this respect, rational MPs will tend to free-ride on their party's reputation and to opt for occasional cross-votes, enhancing their personal electoral record. They will

39 For a review of available research, see: M.P. COLLIE, *Voting Behavior in Legislatures*. In: G. LOEWENBERG, M.E. JEWELL, *Handbook of Legislative Research*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1983, pp. 471-517, M.L. MEZEY, *o.c.*, pp. 336-364.

40 M. HECHTER, *o.c.*, p. 82.

41 M. HECHTER, *o.c.*, p. 86.

shun the effort of drafting and negotiating logrolls in support of collective-benefits legislation, for no credit can be credibly claimed for it.⁴² Majority decision-making, thus, leads to an oversupply of particularistic legislation.⁴³ Yet, by doing so, the national party reputation will suffer from this spendthrift, divided policy.⁴⁴ The solution to this electoral dilemma, is sought in the development of a central authority: the parliamentary party leadership. In exchange for power and prestige, the parliamentary party leadership serves the group's goals by supervising and sanctioning recalcitrant members. In this respect, Gary Cox and Matthew McCubbins call parliamentary parties legislative cartels. By means of their parliamentary leadership, parties attempt to bend parliamentary proceedings, in all stages of the legislative process, to their will. Committee membership is assigned to more loyal members, more committee seats are reserved for party members, the parliamentary agenda is to a considerable extent set by party leaders.⁴⁵

For sanctions are only the electors to give and supervision is fairly costless by means of public roll calls in parliament, Hechter claims party cohesion to be the sole result of members' dependence of their party.⁴⁶ Yet, ex post observation of cohesion is not the party's primary concern, it is to know in advance which members are likely to cross-vote or express criticism to party policy. Such an early-warning system is in fact far from costless.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Hechter tends to underestimate the opportunities to sanction members. Although he discerns sanctions most strictly from the benefits members join groups for⁴⁸, much of his exposition concerning stimuli derived from the party's means revolves to sanctions. Saalfeld claims such stimuli to be material benefits, status, privileges, party support, the denial of the party label, the withdrawal of party logistics, exclusion from the party...⁴⁹ In this respect, members' dependence coincides with the use of sanctions. To distribute party benefits is but a positive sanction, to withdraw them a negative sanction. Thus, party cohesion rests, in Hechter's and Saalfeld's opinion, primarily upon the threat of sanctions. Both formal and informal opportunities to sanction recalcitrant members are ample. Rewards consist in passing information, assigning membership to prestigious committees, awarding office in parliament or government, being part of official delegations to parliaments abroad.⁵⁰ Punishments consist in the withdrawal of particular parliamentary proceedings' rewards, the decrease in the use of parliamentary party staff and infrastructure, the decrease of the parliamentary party's information and guidance support, (temporarily) cutting short a member's career perspectives, roll-

42 G. COX, M. McCUBBINS, *o.c.*, p. 124.

43 H. DÖRING, *Institutions and Policies: Why We Need Cross-National Analysis*. In: H. DÖRING, *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*. Frankfurt, Campus, 1995, pp. 30-31.

44 G. COX, M. McCUBBINS, *o.c.*, pp. 122-125.

45 G. COX, M. McCUBBINS, *o.c.*, pp. 83-84, p. 270 and 278.

46 M. HECHTER, *o.c.*, p. 80.

47 Th. SAALFELD *o.c.*, p. 176.

48 M. HECHTER, *o.c.*, p. 50.

49 Th. SAALFELD, *o.c.*, p. 174.

50 R. JACKSON, *o.c.*, pp. 245-252, F. SORAUF, P. BECK, *Party Politics in America*. London, Scott and Foreman, 1988, pp. 403-407, D. BAKER, A. GAMBLE, S. LUDLAM, *Whips or Scorpions? The Maastricht Vote and the Conservative Party*. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 46, 1993, pp. 151-166.

ing back an already acquired position of authority and status, the threat of being given an impossible position on the electoral list, expulsion from the party.⁵¹

Political parties have, however, in themselves, no place in parliament. They appear but through the presence of their parliamentary party's members. In this perspective, members have the opportunity to shape their task and the party's policy project differently. It is, however, the parliamentary party's leadership's task to prevent such agency effects. Silencing and sanctioning the supreme representatives of the people is at best highly embarrassing for the party leadership. Actual sanctions are by no means self-evident, nor paramount. They are the result of a political decision.⁵²

II. Party Cohesion and Dissension: The Case of the 1991-95 Belgian Chamber

Due to the astounding influence of parties in the Belgian partitocracy, party cohesion is assumed to prosper. Earlier research has shown, party cohesion seldomly drops below 99% of the members.⁵³ The 1991-95 Parliament does not in this respect seem any different. Only public votes could be taken into account, since under these conditions only, is information on individual members' voting records made available. The Belgian Chamber votes secretly on occasion, mostly on the assignment of offices (i.e. the Speaker), or 'by rising in places'. Unlike parliamentary practice in Germany or the Netherlands, however, most divisions on bills, amendments and resolutions are publicly recorded in detail in the official parliamentary records. Votes by rising in places tend to settle procedural matters mostly. No aspects of content could, however, be taken into account.

On average, in about four out of ten divisions do dissenting votes arise. This astoundingly numerous frequency of dissenting votes, is perhaps due to members' possibility to abstain. Unlike in British parliamentary practice, such abstentions are recorded publicly. Abstentions are cast to very different purposes. In order to maintain the balance between majority and opposition, opposition members may consent to pair. All dissenting votes due to publicly announced pairings have been excluded from the table. Yet pairings, that were not publicized in the official records in this way, may continue to bias dissension figures. Abstentions, also, give members the opportunity to explain their rationale after the vote is taken. In this respect, they are used to reaffirm party positions quite often. Abstentions, cast to this purpose, have also been excluded from the table. Abstentions discarded, cross-votes amount to about 10 to 13 % of all divisions. These figures are comparable to dissension in the Conservative Party in the 1959-64 Parliament, well below dissension in the House of Commons since the seventies.⁵⁴

51 A. KING, The Chief Whip's Clothes. In: D. LEONARD, V. HERMAN *The Backbencher and Parliament. A Reader*. London, Macmillan, 1972, pp. 84-85, R. JACKSON, o.c., pp. 201-245, D. BAKER, A. GAMBLE, S. LUDLAM, o.c., 1993, pp. 151-166.

52 R. JACKSON, o.c., p. 32.

53 E. LANGERWERF, o.c., p. 182, M. VERMINCK, o.c., p. 485.

54 Ph. COWLEY, Ph. NORTON, *Are Conservative MPs Revolting? Dissension by Government MPs in the British House of Commons 1976-1996*. Hull, Centre for Legislative Studies, 1997, p. 16.

TABLE I

The Number of Divisions Witnessing Dissenting Votes (1954-95) ⁵⁵

	Number of Divisions Without Dissenting Votes		Number of Divisions With Crossvotes Only
1954-58	60,2 %	n=834	
1958-61	58.5 %	n=617	
1961-65	59.2 %	n=938	
1975-76	61.8 %	n=309	
1977-78	89.6 %	n=297	
1991-92	69.8 %	n=315	13.0 %
1992-93	79.9 %	n=1227	6.3 %
1993-94	62.2 %	n=452	10.6 %
1994-95	62.0 %	n=389	13.9 %

Little difference is shown over the years in the proportion of divisions witnessing dissenting votes. Only the sessions 1977-78 and 1992-93 stand out with far less dissension. Both sessions mark important phases in Belgium's course of federalization. Both in 1977-78 and 1991-92, agreements among the major parties were introduced in parliament. In 1977-78, the Egmont Pact, developed by the party presidents' junta was rejected after fierce Flemish popular protest and the government resigned as a consequence. In 1992-93, the so-called Saint Michael Agreement was committed to law. Although both agreements aimed to reschedule parliamentary proceedings and competences in Belgium to a very considerable extent, parliament was never a major contributor to their conception. The government and party presidents, whom the agreement were originated and developed by, kept members firmly in line. Throughout parliamentary debates in 1992-93, majority members were accused of a passive and docile attitude. ⁵⁶

Moreover, dissensions are mostly individual in nature. In six out of ten divisions, witnessing dissenting votes, only one member cross-votes. If abstentions are added, figures drop only slightly. The average size of dissensions only exceeds 2.00 in three parties: the PRL (the french-speaking liberal party), the Flemish Socialist Party and the green party. ⁵⁷ In four years time, on only five occasions does dissension and abstention (in majority and opposition the like) rise above the majority of 13 seats, the largest dissension reaching up to 28 dissenting members, either cross-voting or abstaining. Needless to say, the government was never threatened. In well over 2.300 divisions, majority party members cross-voted on only 50 occasions (i.e. 2.0%), never issuing more than ten cross-votes at a time. Most large dissenting lobbies concern the issue of amnesty for war-time collaborators, an issue that has divided the Belgian socialist parties for years.

⁵⁵ E. LANGERWERF, *o.c.*, p. 183, M. NOOYENS, *o.c.*, p. 89 and 161.

⁵⁶ S. DEPAUW, *Blijft enkel het Huis overeind? De macht en functionaliteit van het federaal parlement in België via een verstehende inhoudsanalyse van de Sint-Michielsdebatten in Kamer en Senaat*. In: W. DEWACHTER, I. THOMAS, S. DEPAUW, *o.c.*, pp. 157-164.

⁵⁷ The average size of dissensions measures: CVP (1.48), PSC (1.16), VLD (1.81), PRL (2.01), SP (2.37), PS (1.95), VB (1.56), VU (1.22), FDF (1.04), Green (2.31).

TABLE II
The Size of Dissenting Lobbies (1991-1995)

	Cross-votes				Cross-votes and Abstentions			
	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95
1 Only	28	49	25	37	59	146	99	77
2	3	6	3	4	12	52	20	24
3	5	6	5	2	9	14	17	14
4	3	5	6	3	7	9	10	8
5	2	4	3	2	4	10	10	5
6	0	3	2	0	1	4	4	4
7	0	3	2	0	2	5	2	3
7+	0	1	2	6	1	7	9	13
Total	41	77	48	54	95	247	171	148

Dissension is a rather widespread phenomenon in the Belgian 1991-95 Parliament. Merely one in twenty MPs has never expressed an opinion in a division, different from party directives. Yet, one in three MPs never cross-voted in over 2,300 votes. Dissension, moreover, seems a once in a lifetime experience: over half the MPs does not cross-vote on more than one occasion. Only one in ten does so on more than five occasions, the highest number being 19 times. Abstentions are, however, far more acceptable. Four in five members cross-vote or abstain on more than one occasion, one in two on more than four occasions. The most persistent rebel expressed opinions contrary to party directives in no less than 40 divisions. All in all, party dissension is not impressive in the Belgian Parliament: even the most persistent rebel is loyal to his party in more than 98% of the votes. Members of parliament do not so much vote, unconcerned by instruction or consultation, as follow party orders.

Apparently, Belgian party leaders are rather successful in their difficult task of preventing party dissension. Cross-votes are rather scarce, never threatening the government majority. Abstentions occur more frequently, yet still seldom. The question we need to turn our attention to, is if this party unity is the result of the use of sanctions, as a rational choice perspective would assume.

TABLE III

The Number of Dissenting Votes Cast by Members (1991-95)

	Cross-votes		Cross-votes and Abstentions	
	n	%	n	%
0	69	31.22	13	5.88
1	48	21.72	30	13.57
2	38	17.19	20	9.05
3	21	9.50	27	12.22
4	10	4.52	28	12.67
5	12	5.43	12	5.43
6	9	4.07	14	6.33
7	1	0.45	8	3.62
8	1	0.45	7	3.17
9	1	0.45	5	2.26
10	3	1.36	7	3.17
11-15	2	0.90	25	11.31
16-20	4	1.81	17	7.69
21-25	0	0.00	3	1.36
25+	0	0.00	5	2.26

A. Flemish MPs on the Scarcity of Sanctions

In parliamentary members' opinion, however, the use of sanctions is hardly a primordial rationale for party cohesion. Members are elected the people's representatives, not their party's. No amount of party pressure is said to measure up to this simple fact. Although rumors of sanctions taken, reach the press occasionally, instances are scarce and far between. Public sanctioning of members may arouse hostility or resentment. It may not be the most efficient means to bring about compliance. Members tend to stress party identification and internalized support as far more influential. Edward Crowe attests

*'Judging from the distribution of responses and their rank order, conformity is a voluntary process. [...] Commentators have described back-benchers as sheep, driven through the lobbies by power and threats. MPs themselves do not believe this explanation.'*⁵⁸

In fact, most sanctions identified by political science are denied by members a major influence on their behavior. Formal sanctions, like an official blame, to assign an ineligible position on the electoral party list, to force members to resign from committees, withdrawal of the whip or expulsion from the party, are near nonexistent. If used, they are due more to a member's overall reputation and inactivity, than to opinions expressed. As one christian-democratic MP expressed it,

⁵⁸ E. CROWE, o.c., 1986, p. 168.

'The ultimate sanction for a MP is not being on the party list, after all. That is the only major sanction, we all face and all think of, from time to time. All other sanctions, warnings or reproaches, are nonsense. There is no such thing as a deontologic committee here.'

TABLE IV
Flemish MPs' Opinions on the Use of Sanctions

	Total	Christian-Democrats	Socialists	Liberals
Warning	1.84	2.52	1.11	1.69
Isolation of Rebellious Members	1.32	1.71	1.32	0.84
Reduction of Promotion Chances in Cabinet	1.15	1.48	1.44	0.50
Reduction of Promotion Chances in Party	1.20	1.61	1.29	0.39
Refusal of Readoption, Ineligible Position on Party List	0.97	1.21	0.94	0.70
Official Blame	0.75	0.96	0.44	0.78
Refusal to Act as Party Spokesman ⁵⁹	0.43	0.70	0.28	0.25
Denial of Party Logistic Support	0.33	0.52	0.31	0.11
Resignation from Committee	0.20	0.25	0.01	0.26
Expulsion From Party	0.17	0.28	0.10	0.10
Withdrawal of the Whip	0.16	0.16	0.01	0.25
Denial of Financial Party Support for Campaigning	0.12	0.22	0.01	0.01
N	67	26	21	20

In the course of the K.U.Leuven 1997-98 Seminar on Political Sociology, current Members of the Flemish Parliament were asked to comment on a list of 12 possible sanctions, that could inspire members to compliance. Grounded on extensive transcripts, each sanction was given a rank from 0 to 5: 0 being nonexistent as a sanction for rebellious conduct, 5 being almost self-evidently administered and of great importance in ensuring party cohesion. Even the lightest of sanctions appears, however, parsimonious. The ensuing pattern of sanctions is by and large shared by all three major parties. Only the reduction of promotion chances in cabinet is considerably less important among liberals, for they have not been part of the government since 1988.

⁵⁹ Members tend to stress their constitutional right to speak freely. No member can be denied to speak in parliament, but for reasons of disorder. Yet, this is a presidential prerogative. Parties have no say in this matter. Members do, however, concede, the party leadership discourages outliers to speak in debates.

According to MPs, sanctions are highly informal in nature. Rebellious members are dressed down by party leaders. They tend to become isolated among colleagues. Persistently dissident members inspire to reputations as mavericks. They are looked upon as no-good party members, as 'untrust worthy' liberals, socialists or christian-democrats. Most sanctions are but the result of this breach in faith. Such members tend to be passed over, when promotions are granted. They tend to face a more critical constituency party, when electoral lists are compiled. The expulsion from committee, parliamentary party and party is but the ultimate consequence of this reputation.

B. Ministerial Portfolios as Artificial Sweeteners

In their pursuit of political influence and good policy, a ministerial portfolio appears to be the MPs' ultimate reward. It has been asserted throughout most of the twentieth century by political scientists, parliament is no longer a major force in decision-making. Nine out of every ten bills being initiated by the cabinet, ministers can be said to be in the driver's seat regarding policy.⁶⁰ Ministerial portfolios are important social rewards in the parliamentary environment. They contribute considerably to members' influence and status. Former King's Chief of Staff, Molitor illustrates the yawning gap between a minister and a mere MP:

*'In our political system, the ministerial office is at the nodal point of true power. [...] Yesterday's minister, one was the next big thing in public life. A former minister, again holding but a seat in the Chamber or the Senate, represents nothing or even less. No court, no secretariat, no fellow-workers, no material means of action; a clientele that turns away and solicits help elsewhere. One has returned to being but a number in one's seat.'*⁶¹

In this respect, a ministerial portfolio is a powerful reward for otherwise near powerless members of Parliament.

In fact, the minister's office is coveted to such an extent, some 15% of British MPs make the pursuit of office their primordial reason of existence.⁶² Ministerial aspirants tend to follow an unclear path towards office: speaking often in parliament (but not too often), impressing by competence and industry, and perhaps most important, being obedient to party directives. The party leadership controls many, near invisible instruments to obstruct MPs' path to power. Though it is under no circumstances the only factor shaping MPs' promotion chances, party loyalty does tend to influence party leaders' decision.⁶³ According to one socialist member,

'I think young members of parliament, whom I had high hopes for, keep silent too often, because they want a ministerial post too eagerly. If you are an annoyance, off course, and go against things, you risk never becoming a minister. [...] Jef Sleenckx will never be a minister. Do you get my meaning? Was he to keep silent, he would be.'

60 W. DEWACHTER, o.c., p. 20.

61 A. MOLITOR, *Feuilles de route. Extraits d'un journal*. Paris, Duculot, 1987, p. 49.

62 D.D. SEARING, o.c., p. 85.

63 Ph. NORTON, o.c., 1980, p. 167.

To promote a persistent rebel would cause a rebellion among back-benchers who loyally supported their party throughout the long and tedious years in opposition.⁶⁴ More ambitious members do, thus, tend to be less often openly critical of party policy.⁶⁵

TABLE V

The Number of Cross-votes and Abstentions by Future Ministers

	Cross-votes					Abstentions				
	91-92	92-93	93-94	94-95	91-95	91-92	92-93	93-94	94-95	91-95
M.Colla (SP)	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	1
E.Baldewijns (SP)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
M.Lebrun (PSC)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
J.Peeters (SP)	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	1
L.Peeters (SP)	0	0	1	1	2	0	2	0	0	2
K.Pinxten (CVP)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
J.PPoncelet (PSC)	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	4
J.Santkin (PS)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
J.Vande Lanotte (SP)	1	0	1	0	2	0	1	2	1	4
F.Vandenbroucke (SP)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
E.Van Rompuy (CVP)	1	0	0	2	3	0	0	1	1	2
Y.Ylief (PS)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2

Although promoting a persistent rebel into the cabinet is a well-trying instrument to commit him or her to silence by the dictates of collective responsibility, Belgian candidate ministers tend to be less rebellious than their back-bench counterparts. While members cross-vote on average 2.28 times in the 1991-95 Parliament, members who were to become minister afterwards, voted contrary to party directives only once in four years. They abstained on average 2.58 times, which is slightly over half of the average member's rebelliousness. None of the ministers-to-be cross-voted more than three times and never more than twice in the same year.

The rationale for a negative relationship between ministerial portfolios and rebelliousness, can, to an important extent, as well be turned around. Frustrated expectations of promotion tend to embitter members' feelings of party loyalty. Rebelliousness may, thus, be born out of lack of promotion opportunities, rather than members are denied promotion because of persistent cross-voting. Soured expectations may provide a powerful stimulus for dissidence, according to John Major's slip of the tongue on the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty.

⁶⁴ E. SHORT, *o.c.*, p. 182.

⁶⁵ A. KING, *o.c.*, p. 82, Ph. NORTON *o.c.*, 1980, p. 220, J.E. SCHWARZ, G. LAMBERT, Career Objectives, Group Feeling and Legislative Party Voting Cohesion: the British Conservatives 1959-68. *Journal of Politics*. 33, 1971, pp. 399-421.

*'Just think it through from my perspective. You are the Prime Minister with a majority of 18, a party that is harking back to a golden age that never was, and is now invented. You have three right-wing members of the Cabinet, who actually resign. [...] Where do you think most of this poison is coming from? From the dispossessed and the never-possessed. You can think of ex-ministers, who are going round causing all sorts of trouble. We don't want another three more of the bastards out there.'*⁶⁶

Preliminary findings in the Belgian Parliament suggest, however, ministers-in-waiting do tend to exhibit less behavior, critical of party policy. A conclusion that is by and large convergent with Thomas Saalfeld's assessment of party dissension and its limiting effect on cabinet membership in the German Bundestag.⁶⁷

C. Committee Transfers and the Use of Sanctions

Parliamentary decision-making is, to a considerable extent, confined to committees. Due to the multiplication and enlargement of governmental tasks, the parliamentary call for expertness cannot be satisfied other than through specialization and division of labor. The Cabinet enjoys sources of information, parliament cannot dream to counterbalance. This extensive division of parliamentary labor is embodied by committees. Through specialization and year-long study, committees provide the opportunity to increase knowledge exponentially. Through its parallel decision-making channels, legislative production can be multiplied. Due to a smaller membership and the anonymity of closed door proceedings, Belgian committees allow members and parties to negotiate freely, far from the limelight of public opinion and reach an agreement far more easily.⁶⁸ In fact, strong committees appear a necessary condition to strong parliaments.⁶⁹ Following the US Congress' example, strong committees and strong parliamentary parties appear, moreover, to be in contradiction.⁷⁰

Yet, because of committee members' more pronounced influence on policy, in the bosom of the parliamentary party and in plenary parliament, parties do try to control committees. Committees are not solely autonomous actors, accountable only to themselves, nor agents of the House. Committees are instruments of party dominance too.⁷¹ The distribution of committee seats is proportional to the parties' number of parliamentary seats. Members are assigned to committees by their parliamentary party leadership.⁷² Although members' preferences are accommodated when possible, the absence of a strict seniority rule provides the

⁶⁶ Off-the-record remark by John Major to a journalist, recorded by D. BAKER, A. GAMBLE, S. LUDLAM, *The Parliamentary Siege of Maastricht and British Ratification. Parliamentary Affairs*. 47, 1994, p. 37.

⁶⁷ Th. SAALFELD, *o.c.*, p. 307.

⁶⁸ M.A. PIERSON, *Le rôle des commissions dans le travail parlementaire. Res Publica*. 22, 1980, 1-2, pp. 123-130.

⁶⁹ I. MATTSON, K. STRØM, *Parliamentary Committees*. In: H. DÖRING, *o.c.*, pp. 250-251 and pp. 253-254.

⁷⁰ M. VAN SCHENDELEN, *Fracties en kamercommissies*. In: J. THOMASSEN, M.L. ZIELONKA-GOEI, M. VAN SCHENDELEN, *o.c.*, p. 76, L.D. LONGLEY, R.H. DAVIDSON, *Parliamentary Committees: Changing Perspectives on Changing Institutions. Journal of Legislative Studies*. 4, 1998, 1, p. 2 and 6.

⁷¹ G. COX, M. McCUBBINS, *o.c.*, pp. 159-160.

⁷² I. MATTSON, K. STRØM, *o.c.*, p. 275.

party leadership with a powerful tool to reward or punish members. More loyal members tend to be assigned to more powerful committees. More loyal members tend to be awarded more chairmanships, secretary and vice-chairmanships. Since outside committees, parliamentary legislative opportunities are scarce, members are particularly dependent upon their party.

Although, due to small numbers of MPs holding committee office of some kind, comparing office holders' rebelliousness with ordinary members' is a hazardous task, figures tend to suggest committee chairmen, both in government and opposition, are not especially more prudent in expressing views of criticism. Perhaps salience and expertness are more important criteria for selection and cross-voters do tend to get noticed. Because of chairmen's pivotal task in parliamentary performance, they tend to be filled by the party's more influential members. In this respect, chairmen may take the liberty of a more personal voting record, for sanctioning them is near impossible. Secretaries and vice-chairmen tend to be more loyal, both in government and opposition. The elevated percentage of persistent rebels in opposition, holding committee office, is particularly subject to small numbers and should therefore be interpreted with caution.

Committee office does, thus, not seem to act as an artificial sweetener, inspiring members to party loyalty. Although individual members may admit to it, by and large committee offices are not precluded for more rebellious members. Offices are granted in parliament more for reasons of seniority and expertness, rather than on grounds of party discipline. Promotion in parliament is not a reward to be given lightly on party grounds. This conclusion is largely convergent with Thomas Saalfeld's more far-reaching study of the German Bundestag from 1945 up to 1990.⁷³

TABLE VI
Committee Offices and MPs' Rebelliousness⁷⁴

	Rebelliousness in the Majority Parties (n=123)					Rebelliousness in the Opposition Parties (n=99)				
	0	Low	Moderate	High	Persistent	0	Low	Moderate	High	Persistent
Chairman (n=21)	0.0	56.3	6.3	37.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	60.0	00.0	40.0
Vice-Chairman (n=15)	27.3	36.4	27.3	0.0	9.1	0.0	0.0	25.0	25.0	50.0
Secretary (n=21)	9.1	36.4	45.5	9.1	0.0	0.0	10.0	50.0	10.0	30.0
Total (n=57)	10.5	44.7	23.7	18.4	2.6	0.0	5.3	47.4	10.5	36.8
Total MPs (n=221)	11.4	53.7	28.5	5.7	0.8	0.0	12.1	36.4	28.3	23.2

⁷³ Th. SAALFELD, *o.c.*, pp. 298-306.

⁷⁴ Members' rebelliousness is measured by weighing the number of abstentions by one half and adding the number of cross-votes emitted. Categories are developed as follows: '0' indicates that no cross-votes or abstentions were emitted, 'low' indicates 2 or less cross-votes and abstentions, 'moderate' indicates between 2 and 6 cross-votes and abstentions, 'high' indicates scores between 6 and 10. Persistent rebels cross-vote or abstain on more than 10 separate occasions.

Some committees are coveted more, however, than others. They control more extensive budgets, formulate policy in areas, more interfering in societal life. Committee transfers may, thus, enhance or obstruct members' career opportunities. Committee transfers may, thus, be used as sanctions by the parliamentary party leadership. To this purpose, however, a ranking of committees needs to be developed, since there is no formal committee caste system in Belgium, nor has there been a survey among parliamentary members conducted on this subject, as in the Netherlands.⁷⁵ No more quantitative foundation has been sought for this ranking, but the members' of the K.U.Leuven Section of Political Sociology sounder insight and judgment. Arguably, the ranking of individual committees may be subject to much criticism. The importance attached to committees is highly dependent on the parliamentary member under consideration or the time period studied. All in all, the proposed ranking constitutes, in my opinion, a defensible and helpful instrument.

TABLE VII

Ranking Committees in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives (1991-95)

Top Committees	Powerful Committees	Less Influential Committees	More Formal Committees
Constitutional Review and Institutional Reform ⁷⁶	Defence	Audit	European Affairs
Finance	Foreign Affairs	Agriculture and Shopkeepers	Naturalizations
Justice	Infrastructure	National Health and Environment	Petitions
Home Affairs	Persecutions	Problems Regarding Trade and Economic Law	Social Emancipation
Rules and Parliamentary Proceedings Reform ⁷⁶	Welfare	Trade and Industry and Science Policy	

Committee transfers are, however, scarce in the Belgian Parliament. Members do not so much change from one committee to another, as move to and fro between membership and supply membership. Changes are mostly due to members being promoted into the cabinet, or to the Flemish Liberals' enlargement policy in 1992. In the course of renaming the party to VLD (Flemish Liberals and Democrats), two Volksunie MPs, one socialist and one christian-democrate crossed the floor. One additional Volksunie MP went over to the christian-democrates as a result. In the aftermath, this caused a considerable rescheduling of committee

⁷⁵ M. VAN SCHENDELEN, *o.c.*, pp. 92-93.

⁷⁶ Due to the parliamentary adoption of the agreement of Saint-Michael to further federalise Belgium and to reform the federal bicameral system, these committees take on a particular importance in 1991-95. The Rules Committee is by no means comparable to its namesake in the US Congress. Agenda-setting is performed in the Conference of Chairmen, which encompasses parliamentary party leaders.

membership in the parties involved. Due to small numbers, the following table inspires to caution in interpretation.

Changing from actual membership to supply membership and vice versa appears to be relatively unrelated to the members' rebelliousness. Both in government and opposition, members who lose their actual membership appear only most slightly more tempted to voting dissension, members who gain actual membership, only most modestly more loyal. Differences are, however, near negligible. Resignation from committees can result out of many different causes, most of them probably unrelated to party loyalty. Nevertheless, preliminary findings tend to suggest resignation is more probable among more rebellious members. Especially, in high ranking committees more rebellious majority members resign more often than average. Among opposition members, evidence is even less clear-cut. More rebellious members appear to resign from second rank committees more often than average, although not from top committees. Majority members who are assigned to more valued committees appear slightly more rebellious than average, while opposition members who rise in committee status seem slightly more loyal. Perhaps opposition parties face moderately less negative media attention, allowing them to sanction members somewhat more freely. Committee transfers, decreasing the member's status are too few in number to allow sensible conclusions to be drawn.

TABLE VIII

Committee Transfers and Members' Rebelliousness (1991-95)

	Rebelliousness in Majority Parties					Rebelliousness in Opposition Parties				
	0	Low	Moderate	High	Persistent	0	Low	Moderate	High	Persistent
Member → Supply M. ⁷⁷	13.3	53.3	23.3	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	45.0	40.0	15.0
Supply M. → Member	18.8	46.9	25.0	6.3	3.1	0.0	3.1	53.1	31.3	12.5
Resignation from ⁷⁸										
- Committee rank 1	0.0	50.0	25.0	18.8	6.3	0.0	0.0	45.0	25.0	25.0
- Committee rank 2	17.6	35.3	41.2	5.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	21.4	35.7	42.9
- Committee rank 3	12.5	31.3	31.3	25.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	53.3	33.3	13.3
- Committee rank 4	0.0	62.5	37.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	33.3	0.0	66.6
Committee Transfers:										
- to higher ranking committee	27.3	45.5	0.0	27.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	72.7	18.2	9.1
- to lower ranking committee	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	60.0	40.0	0.0
Total Members (n=221)	11.4	53.7	28.5	5.7	0.8	0.0	5.3	47.4	10.5	36.8

⁷⁷ The basic fact, serving as foundation to the table, are not MPs, but committee transfers and resignations. In fact, one MP may resign from more than one committee or may be transferred from one committee to another on more than one occasion.

⁷⁸ From these resignations have been excluded all Volksunie members, who withdrew from all committees after a number of their colleagues went over to the Flemish Liberals, VLD.

Committee transfers are, thus, rather ineffective in preventing members from cross-voting or otherwise expressing views critical of party policy. It seems rebels' 'ten minutes of fame' are not so much followed by 'a lifetime in the political wilderness'. In fact, when members' committee status at the end of session is compared to their rebelliousness, the relationship is negative (Pearson's $r^2 = -.23$). This is, however largely due to differences in committee status between majority and opposition members. Within majority parties and within the opposition, members' committee status is rather unrelated to their rebelliousness (majority Pearson's $r^2 = .07$; opposition Pearson's $r^2 = -.08$). Differences in committee status between majority and opposition members lend, thus, support to Gary Cox and Matthew McCubbins' thesis of legislative cartels: majority parties systematically tend to bias committee assignments to their advantage.

TABLE IX

Committee Status and Members' Rebelliousness (1991-95) ⁷⁹

Committee Status	Rebelliousness in Majority Parties						Rebelliousness in Opposition Parties					
	0	Low	Moderate	High	Persistent	Total	0	Low	Moderate	High	Persistent	Total
Low	7.7	53.8	30.8	7.7	0	13	0.0	9.1	30.3	36.4	24.2	33
Moderate	9.3	62.8	23.3	4.7	0	43	0.0	16.7	33.3	19.4	30.6	36
High	17.1	41.5	24.4	7.3	2.4	42	0.0	0.0	30.8	38.5	30.8	13
Total	15.5	52.6	24.7	6.2	1.0	97	0.0	11.0	29.3	29.3	28.0	82

Although majority members in lower valued committees appear to be slightly less loyal than average, thus, lending support to the use of committee transfers and assignments as a disciplinary sanction, differences are small. On the other hand, opposition members in lower valued committees seem less rebellious than their more renowned counterparts. Though, this could be merely due to the small number of opposition members, that enjoy particularly high status in committee proceedings. Thus, it cannot be claimed, committee transfers constitute a major sanction for rebelliousness, except in isolated cases. Committee transfers are not employed to this purpose on a wide or systematic basis.

D. 'For Whom the Bell Tolls', the Electoral Sanction

Numerous are the accounts that members of parliament are no longer the nobility and notability, their nineteenth century counterparts were. Members cannot credibly claim reelection without their party's support. Members commonly lack the necessary means to fight electoral campaigns personally. Especially under conditions of proportional representation, the transfer of party votes makes it near impossible for members, who rank near the bottom of the list, to obtain reelection without the advantage of party votes. Only 0.62% of all members, elected to the Chamber since 1919, did so only on preference votes. Members tend to

⁷⁹ Members' committee status is measured by weighing supply membership of the different rank committees by one half and adding committees' full membership. The importance of committees is weighed by 4 for top committees, 3 for powerful committees, 2 for less influential committees and 1 for more formal committees. Moreover, ministers and members who did not complete the session are excluded from the following table.

get elected only on the leader's tailcoats. To refuse members' readoption or to assign members to an ineligible position on the party list, constitutes, thus, a powerful deterrent to parliamentary rebellion, witnessing British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson's renowned dog-phrase:

*'Every dog is allowed one bite, but a different view is taken of a dog that goes on biting all the time -if there are doubts that the dog is biting, not because of the dictates of conscience but because he is considered vicious, then things happen to that dog. He may not get his license returned when it falls due.'*⁸⁰

Socialist parliamentary party leader at the time, Louis Tobback, echoes straightforwardly:

*'Needless to say, when a member of parliament initiates amendments to a minister's proposals of his own party, he will have to fight for his position on the party list the next time.'*⁸¹

However, from an American point of view -and to a certain extent British, too-, it has been stressed members cannot be denied reelection this way. Party labels are assigned to candidates by constituency parties. Central party offices are said to have little impact on this candidate selection process. When intervening, central party offices exert pressure most often in support of the member in question.⁸² Moreover, party labels are denied particularly seldom and mostly for personal reasons or due to a perceived negligence of constituency affairs.⁸³ In the Belgian partitocracy, however, central party office can and does exert a more noticeable influence upon candidate selection. Although the party list of candidates is officially dressed by constituency party officials, party executives tend to shepherd things covertly. Especially the Senate lists -when two constituencies encompass the whole of Flanders and Walloon- are largely compiled in party headquarters. In conserving the many, delicate balances, inherent to proportional representation list compilation, lie many opportunities for sanctioning recalcitrant members. Thus, rather than members enjoying independence from their local, strategic importance, parties exploit members' local ties electorally.⁸⁴ One MP attests:

'It is something banging continuously over everyone's head, an ineligible position. It's not because today you prosper, you will be still on the list in 1999, or vice versa. [...] You know you can risk voting undisciplinedly only once or twice. You won't be given a third chance, by then you will find yourself outside the party.'

To this purpose, the rebelliousness of elected and non-elected members is compared. Elected are all 1991 Parliament members, who hold a seat in 1995 in the

80 H. WILSON, *The Times*. March, 3th 1967.

81 L. TOBBACK, *Knack*. July, 15th 1981.

82 L. EPSTEIN, British MPs and Their Local Parties: The Suez Cases. *American Political Science Review*. 54, 1960, p. 386, E. OZBUDUN, *Party Cohesion in Western Democracies: A Causal Analysis*. Beverly Hills, Sage, 1970, p. 337, D. LEONARD, How Candidates Are Chosen? In: D. LEONARD, V. HERMAN, o.c., p. 17.

83 L. EPSTEIN o.c., 1960, p. 374, R. JACKSON o.c., p. 290, D. LEONARD, o.c., p. 18, A.D.R. DICKSON, MPs Readoption Conflicts: Their Causes and Consequences. *Political Studies*. 23, 1975, 1, pp. 64-65.

84 M.L. MEZEY, o.c., p. 342.

Chamber, the Senate, the Flemish Parliament or the French Community Council. Excluded are ministers, who have to yield their seat since the 1992-93 Parliamentary Reform, and members who were elected to the European Parliament in 1994. Needless to say, members resign for fairly different reasons: due to old age, to other professional tasks, to readoption problems,... Yet, to discern resignation from sanctions is a hazardous task. Members may publicly announce to withdraw for personal reasons, after party leadership made it understood, it will not support members' candidacy.

TABLE X

Reelection Expectations and Members' Rebelliousness

Rebelliousness	Majority Parties		Opposition Parties	
	Reelected	Not-Reelected	Reelected	Not-Reelected
0	12.90	9.52	0.00	0.00
Low	53.76	47.62	6.85	26.09
Moderate	30.11	19.05	32.88	47.83
High	2.15	23.81	31.51	21.74
Persistent	1.08	0.00	28.77	4.35
Total	93	21	73	23
Average	1.99	3.14	8.24	5.00

In majority parties, elected members seem less rebellious than their resigning counterparts. Noticeably more reelected members exhibit only low to moderate standards of rebelliousness. Members, who lost their seat in the 1995 Parliaments exhibit a more dissident behavior. Thus, reelection seems to be influenced by party executives on grounds of party loyalty. Persistent rebels appear to be eliminated at the next elections. Yet, differences in the average level of rebelliousness are not statistically significant. Chances, tied to a t-test on averages, amount to 0.11. Oddly, differences in the opposition are significant ($p=0.02$), yet in the other direction. Opposition members that are more loyal appear to enjoy less chance at reelection. Perhaps, public salience is more conclusive in pursuing an eligible position on the opposition party list; a salience, members may aim for, by exhibiting their independence from party executives, in speech and voting. In this respect, party leadership's position to deny readoption and as a consequence reelection to recalcitrant members is not as comfortable as some witnesses tend to testify. Rebelliousness is not sanctioned on any systematic, all-encompassing level by withdrawing party support at elections.

E. Rebelliousness and the Parliamentary Division of Labor

Overt sanctioning of recalcitrant members is a highly contentious procedure. Sanctions are by no means paramount. In spite of their apparently frightening effectivity, sanctions are used only parsimoniously. If selective incentives can solve parliamentary parties' free-rider problem, they do pose a second order dilemma. Parliamentary party leadership is, in fact, dependent upon the members' sup-

port in intra-party elections.⁸⁵ Sanctions are highly stigmatizing: one-off rebels may be forced into persistent intra-party opposition by too consistent sanctioning.⁸⁶ Moreover, selective incentives entail production costs too, members will have to be prepared to bear. Thus, from a rational point of view, members will try to shun their contribution to controlling noncompliant behavior, since formal controls constitute, in their turn, some collective good. Yet, in a way the same reasons that cause members to form parliamentary groups and to create a central authority, will inspire them to comply with the production of formal controls.⁸⁷ Because of their dependence on the parliamentary party for valued assets like reelection, political influence, ministerial portfolios, good policy, members are forced to take up their share of the burden, if they are to profit from the group's resources.

Thus, covert withdrawal of party support from rebellious members is perhaps a more probable strategy. The parliamentary party leadership controls a wide variety of near invisible instruments that can shape a member's parliamentary career. As the party leadership determines the pace of the legislative process, sanctioning resources and the opportunities to use them tend only to increase.⁸⁸ In the distribution of workload within parliamentary party confines, skulks many an opportunity to discourage dissension. Recalcitrant members may no longer be granted the opportunity to speak for the party in parliament's leading debates. Rebels' bill proposals or oral questions may be obstructed by the parliamentary party. Logistic support by parliamentary party fellow-workers and secretaries may be withdrawn. Parliamentary party proceedings may, thus, provide a powerful filter vis-à-vis members' unwanted proposals.

In this respect, more rebellious members' levels of activity in parliament may tend to decrease. Levels of activity can be measured by taking account of the length of members' speeches in the plenary debates, as these are literally reproduced in the official parliamentary records.⁸⁹ Ministers and members, who did not hold a seat for one entire year, are, however, excluded. Yet, more rebellious members do not appear to be silenced in debates. In fact, Pearson's correlation coefficient is positive in nature. Less compliant members are rather more active than their more loyal counterparts ($r^2 = .30$). To a certain extent -though not solely-, this positive relationship is but the result of opposition members' higher activity and rebelliousness. Both within opposition and majority parties, the relationship is still positive, though less impressive: correlation coefficients amount to .13 for opposition parties and .15 for majority parties.

85 R.L. CALVERT, Reputation and Legislative Leadership. *Public Choice*. 55, 1987, p. 85.

86 Ph. NORTON, *o.c.*, 1980, pp. 169-172.

87 M. HECHTER, *o.c.*, pp. 106-107.

88 R.L. CALVERT, *o.c.*, p. 102.

89 I. THOMAS, Words, words, words...? De deelname van de parlementsleden aan de plenaire debatten kwantitatief geanalyseerd. In: W. DEWACHTER, I. THOMAS, S. DEPAUW, *o.c.*, pp. 75-115.

TABLE XI

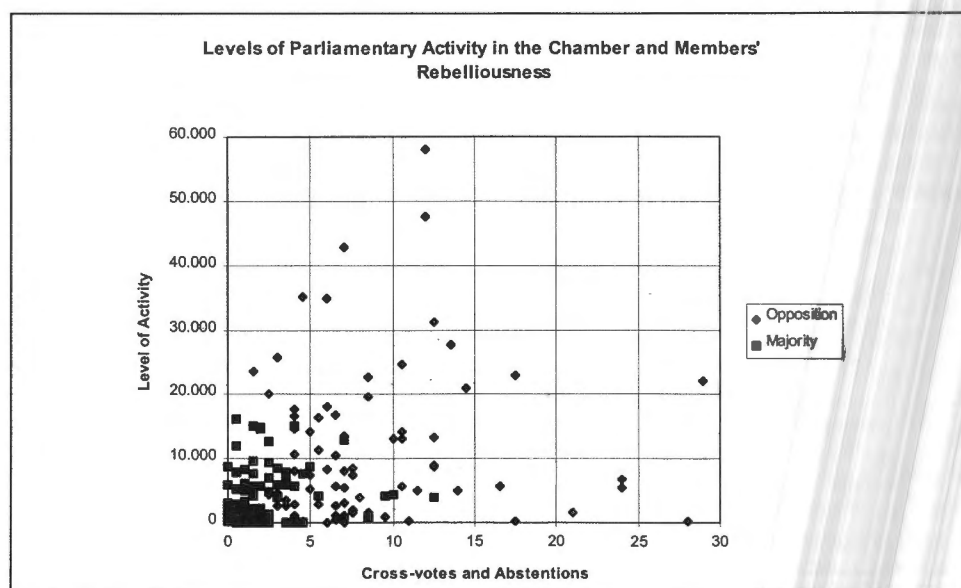
Levels of Parliamentary Activity in the Chamber and Members' Rebelliousness

Level of Activity	Rebelliousness in Majority Parties					Rebelliousness in Opposition Parties				
	0	Low	Moderate	High	Persistent	0	Low	Moderate	High	Persistent
Inactive	0	6	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Low	4	12	2	0	0	0	2	4	3	3
Moderate	4	11	2	1	0	0	0	2	8	1
High	2	14	6	2	1	0	1	10	6	5
Very High	1	10	9	1	0	0	1	16	11	14

In majority parties, members tend on average to be both less active in plenary debates and less rebellious. Those members, who do exhibit occasional criticism, appear not to be sanctioned for it, for they are by no means less active than their less critical colleagues. More loyal members appear to divided rather evenly over different levels of activity. In the opposition parties, observations are fairly similar, though both rebelliousness and levels of activity are a good deal more elevated. More persistent rebels do not exhibit to be forced to a lesser industry in parliamentary proceedings, nor do more loyal members appear more active. Thus, opportunities to sanction recalcitrant members, though paramount, are used only scarcely. By no means is sanctioning rebels a standard party procedure.

SCHEME II

Levels of Activity in the Chamber and Members' Rebelliousness (1991-95)



Conclusion

Members of Parliament have often been attributed a Prussian discipline. As a result, divisions would be and are largely foregone conclusions. From a rational choice perspective, party cohesion is but the result of party leadership's monitoring and sanctioning possibilities. Collective party goods, like reelection, influence, a government majority are attainable only when free-riding can be discouraged. Sanctions and the fear of them are, thus, the cement holding parties together. Noncompliant members are said to achieve '10 minutes of fame, followed by a lifetime in the political wilderness'. Yet, the tolling division bell does not appear a death-bell for rebellious members. Rebelliousness appears only to affect ministerial promotion and reelection in the majority parties -though the latter only in the slightest of ways. Noncompliant members do hold seats in more powerful committees, even hold committee chairmanships. They are allowed to speak in parliament on behalf of their party, numerous and at great length. Party leaders, thus, appear to face more dilemmas than opportunities in their pursuit of party cohesion. Sanctions are scarce and largely ineffective on a systematic level. Needless to say, this does not preclude sanctions to be highly significant in individual cases. Yet, party cohesion does not appear to rest solely on the use of sanctions. Perhaps the Chief Whip's clothes are, as one scholar and MP pointed out, but transparent.⁹⁰

Summary: Parliamentary Party Cohesion and the Scarcity of Sanctions in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives (1991-1995)

Party cohesion is crucial in parliamentary proceedings, for the strength of parties is determined by it. However high levels of party unanimity, parliamentary party cohesion is under no circumstances to be taken for granted. It is the outcome of a persistent struggle. From a rational choice point of view, the monitoring and sanctioning of recalcitrant MPs by the parliamentary party leadership is the condition sine qua non for party cohesion. Yet, rewards and punishments do not seem the cement that holds parliamentary parties together. Preliminary findings for the Belgian Chamber of Representatives, show that ministerial appointment, committee transfers, nor party list compilation are used systematically to this purpose.

90 A. KING o.c., p. 84.