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Hoffmann-Lange, Ursula

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7 Elite Transformation and Democratic Consolidation in Germany after 1945 and 1989

Ursula Hoffmann-Lange

INTRODUCTION: THE ROLE OF ELITES IN DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

The third wave of democratization (Huntington 1991) has confronted the social sciences with a wealth of new theoretical and empirical questions. In the recent literature, a shift in theoretical focus can be observed. Macro explanations based on theories of modernization have given way to micro-level analyses focusing on political actors. Even though there is no doubt that democracy and socio-economic development are associated, the relationship between the two is far from perfect. While modernization can be considered as a necessary precondition of democratization, it is by no means a sufficient one (cf. Neubauer 1969; Huntington 1991: 59 ff.; Hadenius 1994). As the figures presented by Huntington (1991: 62) show, there are almost no democracies below a certain level of modernization, while most highly modernized countries are democratic. In the countries with intermediate levels of socio-economic development, however, the ratio of democratic and non-democratic systems is nearly balanced.

This partial independence of social structure and political order (Lepsius 1969) requires a search for other explanatory factors, among which the strategic actions of elites are certainly of prime importance (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Higley and Burton 1989; Bermeo 1990; Karl and Schmitter 1991; Lipset 1994). Democratization can thus be considered as resulting from an agreement among different elites which may either gradually evolve or come about as an elite settlement to end a longlasting social, economic, or political crisis (Rustow 1970; Burton and Higley 1987).

However, especially where the introduction of democracy resulted from an elite settlement, the particular constellation of actors

and socio-economic conditions that gave rise to it, is not likely to persist. A change in the balance of power may open new options and afford anti-democratic groups among the elites opportunities to subvert the proper functioning of the democratic institutions. Therefore, the period following an elite settlement, i.e. the period of consolidation, is crucial for its survival. At the elite level, successful democratic consolidation requires the formation of a 'consensually unified elite' whose members accept the democratic rules of the game, engage in restrained partisanship, and display a fairly high degree of structural elite integration (cf. Field and Higley 1980; Higley and Burton 1989; Higley *et al.* 1991). While it is obvious that this cannot be achieved without at least partial replacement of the pre-democratic elites, not much is known about the specific patterns of elite transformation that are more or less conducive to democratic consolidation.

Any successful democratization requires a combination of elite change and elite continuity. In particular, three conditions have to be fulfilled. First, it can be assumed that the chances of democratic consolidation depend on extensive changes within the political elite proper. The members of the pre-democratic political elite have to be replaced by democratically elected political leaders. Moreover, in order to establish effective party competition, the dominant party system which is characteristic of authoritarian and totalitarian political systems (Sartori 1976), has to be transformed into a pluralist party system. This will normally involve the formation of new parties.

However, running the public administration, the judiciary, the economy, as well as other important institutions and organizations of a country, requires expertise and experience. A widespread purge among the old elites in these sectors would eliminate persons with such expertise and thus seriously hamper the restoration of political stability and economic reconstruction. A certain degree of continuity among the non-political elites seems therefore necessary (cf. Higley *et al.* 1996).

Finally, democracy requires effective party competition. This implies that the elites of the non-political sectors are ready to cooperate with any democratically elected government. On the other hand, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes are normally characterized by a collusion among the ruling party and the elites of other sectors and/or by privileges for certain semi-official organizations, e.g. business associations, churches or newspapers. During the democratization process, this collusion has to be broken up. Since old elite

networks tend to outlast a regime change, however, the continued presence of the previously ruling party may seriously jeopardize the process of democratization, unless it undergoes some basic reorganization and elite transformation.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, Germany has gone through various regime changes. It is, therefore, particularly well suited for studying the relationship between regime change and elite transformation. Fortunately, empirical elite research is well developed in Germany, so a wealth of data are available on German elites which allow assessment of the extent and patterns of elite transformation at the crucial historical turning points.¹ This chapter will focus on the two successful instances of democratic consolidation, i.e. West Germany after 1945 and East Germany after 1989, and the patterns of elite transformation that occurred during these periods.

Throughout the chapter, a fairly narrow elite concept will be used that defines national elites as persons who, in their capacity as holders of top leadership positions in society, are able to influence national political decision-making. Under politically stable conditions, the universe of relevant public institutions and private organizations is fairly well institutionalized. During regime transitions, however, changes in the configuration of important collective actors (political institutions, political parties, voluntary associations, media, business corporations) may occur. By focusing exclusively on the old institutional structure one would miss crucial aspects of the transition process. Therefore, any study of elite transformation has to take into account two dimensions. The first refers to *structural changes*, i.e. the emergence of new collective actors or shifts in the balance of power among collective actors, and the second to the patterns of *elite circulation* within institutions and organizations.

Elites are always drawn from a relatively small stratum. They tend to be recruited from a pool of persons who occupy lower ranks in the hierarchies of the same institutions and organizations. Even after a regime change, the members of the new elite are recruited predominantly from that reservoir of eligibles. This means that the new elites usually had already reached positions of some importance under the old regime. If one would consider those individuals as part of the old elite, as is frequently done, the usefulness of the elite concept would suffer, since by definition no elite transformation would ever be possible.² Instead, one important question in elite transformation is how thorough the purge was among top elites as well as among individuals at lower hierarchical levels.

ELITE TRANSFORMATION IN WEST GERMANY AFTER 1945

Before analysing the successful implementation of democracy in West Germany after 1945, it is instructive to ask why the Weimar Republic collapsed in 1933. While there is agreement that institutional and economic factors played a certain role, the reluctance of powerful groups among the German elite to cooperate within a democratic institutional framework was certainly of prime importance. The fundamental conflict over the political order that had already characterized the German Empire of 1871 was not settled in 1919, and persisted throughout the years of the Weimar Republic.

This 'birth defect' of the Weimar Republic is mirrored in the very high degree of continuity in organizational structures and leadership at the outset of the Weimar Republic. The only major change that occurred was a shift in institutional structure from a dualist political system with a powerful monarch as chief executive to a parliamentary system in which political power rested on the results of democratic elections. This shift moved the hitherto marginalized, but electorally strongest party, the Social Democrats, into a pivotal position for government formation. Since the relevant elites had remained the same, however, many among the previously dominant elites refused to accept yesterday's outcasts as their equals, while the SPD leaders lacked assertiveness and acted overcautiously. The governmental instability that resulted from this reluctance of the major political actors to cooperate across traditional cleavage lines, caused widespread public dissatisfaction and eventually brought Germany to the brink of a civil war.

The situation was decisively different in 1945 for two reasons. After the total military defeat in 1945, the presence of the Western occupational powers enforced a purge of the Nazi elite, even though the 'denazification' (*Entnazifizierung*) was otherwise much less thorough than the allied powers had planned at the outset. At the same time, the common experience of persecution by the Nazis had fostered the development of more compromising attitudes among former political adversaries.

During the period of political reconstruction, a complex pattern of elite change and continuity prevailed. Within the political sector, the occupational powers disbanded the governmental structures of the Nazi regime and took complete political control. The party system had to be (re-)built from scratch, and the licence policy of the Allies

enforced a reconstruction from the bottom up, by first granting the right to found party branches only at the local level. Until the foundation of the Federal Republic in 1949, parties could only organize and participate in elections if their leadership had successfully undergone scrutiny for Nazi collaboration. This fostered the formation of an entirely new political leadership. Its core was made up of individuals who had been active politicians of centre or leftist political parties (including communists) during the Weimar Republic. This group of former democratic politicians dominated the first state governments that were elected between 1946 and 1948, and it continued to dominate the first federal government of 1949. A second, larger group was made up of political newcomers, mostly junior political activists who started their political careers during the immediate post-war years and could not have been involved in the Nazi regime because they had been too young (cf. Zapf 1965: 148; Zelinsky 1979). Examples of the latter are Helmut Kohl, Helmut Schmidt and Franz Josef Strauss.

The conditions under which the reformation of the party system took place not only brought a new breed of politicians to power, but also encouraged a fundamental change in the conception of the role of political parties and of party competition. Compared to the transition of 1919, there was much greater discontinuity. The policy of the Allies resulted in the formation of a four-party system with two new and two traditional parties. The foundation of the Christian Democratic Party was a deliberate attempt to overcome the traditional religious cleavage between Catholics and Protestants, even though it was partly based on the remnants of the organizational infrastructure of the former Catholic Centre Party. The formation of the Free Democratic Party ended the traditional split of the liberal movement into left-wing libertarians and right-wing national liberals. Continuity in both organization and political outlook was greater in the Social Democratic Party whose leadership realized the need for a basic reform only in the late 1950s. The Communist Party, finally, also rebuilt its traditional organization. Even though it did not encounter any obstacles and was allowed to run for elections, however, it was not able to establish itself as a relevant political force in post-war West Germany, because in the eyes of the voters it was associated with the communist takeover in East Germany.

One of the major problems after any democratization is the fate of the former ruling party. The allied powers solved this by completely disbanding the Nazi party organization and by banning any organized right-wing political activities. As a result, it was inevitable that former

Nazi party members tried to join the other parties. Even though a systematic study is still lacking, there is sufficient evidence that this never jeopardized the democratic character of those parties. Individuals who had been involved in major Nazi activities could not take over higher party functions or elective political offices after 1945. If they did and their records became known, they were forced to resign from their posts. During the first post-war years, this was accomplished by the occupational powers; later the media or intra-party adversaries took over this watch-dog function. The entire stratum of Nazi functionaries was thus effectively removed from post-war West German politics. This exchange of political personnel was not limited to the top political leadership, but extended to the lower organizational levels as well, even though it cannot be denied that at the local level where central control was not so tight, former Nazi notables sometimes continued to play a role.

The media system was completely reorganized in a similar fashion. Until 1949, a mandatory licence system was in effect and the editors who applied for a publishing licence were scrutinized for previous collaboration with the National Socialist regime. The broadcasting stations were subjected to direct control by the occupying powers. A public broadcasting system run by Germans was only gradually formed from mid-1948 on, but Allied supervision continued until 1955.

This policy entailed the emergence of a new group of media leaders. The new journalists and editors came from three different groups. Some had worked for independent newspapers that had either been banned by the Nazis or had at least retained some independent stance after 1933. Individuals from this background played an important role in the reconstruction of a new press. Since the radio in 1933 had still been a very young medium, they were of lesser significance in the reconstruction of the public broadcasting system. Secondly, the occupational powers actively encouraged public figures, whose democratic credentials were beyond doubt, to participate in the reconstruction of the media system, regardless of their prior occupational backgrounds. Again, such persons were more important in the press than in the radio. Finally, as in politics, the reconstruction period offered many young journalists opportunities to start their professional careers in the new media. Rudolf Augstein, the founder and long-term editor of the first West German news magazine *Der Spiegel*, as well as Axel Springer, the founder of one of the largest German media groups, are two famous examples of the latter group (cf. Bausch 1980; Meyn 1968).

The traditional system of autonomous socio-economic interest groups had been abolished by the Nazis. These organizations had either been banned or come under government control (*Gleichschaltung*). The business organizations that had been part of the German Labor Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*) but had otherwise been able to carry on their activities with only minor interference by the Nazis, restored their old structure by simply re-instating the old names. Within these organizations, a high degree of continuity in leadership personnel prevailed. Nearly half of the executive officers retained their positions (Tornow 1979: 250 ff.). The labour leaders, on the other hand, realized the necessity of a fundamental reorganization of the trade union movement in order to overcome its traditional organizational weakness. Therefore, a unified labour organization was created that was based on economic sector rather than occupation or ideological affiliation (*Industriegewerkschaften*; cf. Bernecker 1979). Despite this organizational discontinuity, however, many trade union leaders from the pre-1933 period retained their leadership positions.

In the other sectors, continuity in organizational structures and leadership was even higher. Apart from individuals who had been prominent Nazi collaborators, no systematic purges took place, although some careers were stuck for a while. The dominant objective was rapid reconstruction. Criteria of professional expertise therefore enjoyed precedence over considerations of political integrity (cf. Edinger 1960; Zapf 1965: 145 ff.). Continuity was highest within the churches that had been able to retain a certain degree of autonomy throughout the years of the Nazi regime. It was also very high in the civil service, where initial attempts at a thorough denazification were soon abandoned in favour of the rapid reconstruction of an effective administration (Zelinsky 1979: 226 ff.; Derlien and Lock 1994: 62; Derlien 1993: 328). The most prominent beneficiary of a denazification policy that did not even eliminate more prominent Nazi collaborators is certainly Hans Globke, the author of the official commentary on the racist Nürnberg laws who, in the 1950s, became state secretary in Konrad Adenauer's chancellor's office.

The data collected by Lewis Edinger on the members of the West Germany elite of 1956, provide a quantitative account of the degree of continuity in the West German elite (1960: 66–7). They show that less than one tenth of the leading post-war politicians had been politically active between 1933 and 1944. In contrast, with the exception of the labour union elites (0 per cent) and the media elites (34 per cent), at

least two-fifths of the other elites had worked in the same sector already between 1933 and 1940.³

These figures partly contradict many critics who have claimed that former Nazi officials continued to play an important role in the political life of post-war West Germany. Greiffenhagen and Greiffenhagen (1979: 46) spoke for instance of the shadow of National Socialism lying on the Federal Republic. This claim is certainly correct with respect to continuities in social structure and value orientations of the majority of the West Germans. It is also true that most Germans who had begun their professional careers during the Nazi period were able to continue that career after the war. After 1945, even many of those who had already achieved ranks of a certain importance succeeded in 'cleaning' their records and got away with it. However, such 'continuity' is inevitable after the fall of any totalitarian regime that requires the compliance of most professionals who work in public bureaucracies. However, the majority of those professionals cannot be considered as having been 'representatives' of the regime.

On the other hand, Edinger's data show that only about one-fifth of the West German elite members of 1956 had belonged to the political opposition against the Nazis. Some others had withdrawn to 'inner exile' (*innere Emigration*) by giving up public office and working in the private sector or not actively pursuing a career that would have required political collaboration. But the dominant pattern had not been resistance, but complacency. The majority of the members of the early West German elite may justly be denominated as 'fellow-travellers'. 'In the German Federal Republic the totalitarian elite was not succeeded by a counter-elite, but rather by a coalition of elites whose members were drawn largely from the ranks of those individuals who had been neither strong and consistent proponents nor opponents of the totalitarian regime' (Edinger 1960: 76).

Edinger (1960: 76ff.) discussed the theoretical implications of these findings, emphasizing that it is unrealistic to expect that a totalitarian elite can be replaced by a democratic counter-elite. The major reason for this is certainly not a lack of opponents to the totalitarian regime. However, while those opponents are certainly honourable people, they often lack the expertise that is necessary for taking over leadership positions, which is more often found among the fellow-travellers. While this may be deplorable from a moral point of view, it is an empirical regularity that is confirmed by the developments in other countries as well. Edinger (1960: 80) ended his analysis of the early West German elite with a remark that is especially pertinent in com-

parison to what happened in East Germany after both 1945 and 1989: 'It follows that to carry through a post-totalitarian political purge demands either the replacement of the native elites by foreigners or extensive socio-economic dislocation.'

ELITE TRANSFORMATION IN EAST GERMANY AFTER 1945 AND 1989

In the eastern part of Germany, the soviet military administration organized a systematic elite exchange that was even more swift and thorough than the one that had taken place after the Nazis had come to power in 1933. This time, elite exchange even extended to the only elite group that had never been bothered by the Nazis, the business elite. In all major sectors and organizations, the old leadership was replaced by members or loyal followers of the Communist Party. Criteria of expertise were deemed to be of only secondary relevance. This resulted in a much slower pace in the reconstruction of effective administrative and economic structures.

The GDR elite was an elite formation implanted from above and not accepted as legitimate by the East Germans. The communist hierarchy of the SED (United Socialist Party)⁴ constituted the only relevant recruitment channel. Internal differentiations according to generation, sector, or party membership played an only subordinate role. Ludz (1968) claimed that the illegal and conspiratorial background of the post-1945 East German leadership had fostered the formation of a closed inner elite circle (*strategische Clique*) whose power rested entirely on the military power of the Soviet Union and whose members felt insecure in their own power positions. Its internal coherence derived from the common loyalty towards the Communist Party. According to Field and Higley (1980), it can be called an 'ideologically unified elite'. The term 'cartel of anxiety', originally coined by Dahrendorf (1967) to characterize the early West German elite, is probably much more appropriate as a characterization of the East German elite between 1945 and 1989.

After the construction of the Berlin Wall (1961), the GDR enjoyed a period of consolidation. In the late 1960s Ludz assumed therefore that the generation of the pre-war communist leadership would gradually be replaced by a group of younger, more technocratically oriented elites whom he considered as a kind of 'institutionalized counter-elite' (*institutionalisierte Gegenelite*). He predicted that this generational

replacement would lead to a more pragmatic and successful economic policy and that the totalitarian system of state socialism would give way to what he called a 'consultative authoritarianism'. Ludz based his expectation on reform initiatives taken at the beginning of the 1960s.

In fact, however, the old communist leadership held on to power and the reform policies were soon abandoned. The East German elite renewed itself only marginally over the years of the existence of the GDR. Accordingly, the average age of the GDR elite increased considerably over the years. Among the members of the SED Central Committee, it went up from 46 in the 1960s to 61 in the late 1980s, and among the members of the Politburo from 52 to 65. Even the average age of the candidates for the Central Committee increased at the same rate (cf. Schneider 1994: 78f.; Meyer 1991: 151 ff.). Some members of the first generation such as Erich Honecker, Willi Stoph, Erich Mielke, Kurt Hager, and Horst Sindermann were still in power in 1989.⁵ Even Egon Krenz (born 1937), the designated successor to Erich Honecker, had already reached his fifties in 1989.

This is not the place for a detailed discussion of the causes of the breakdown of the state socialist regime in East Germany. International and economic factors certainly played an important role in weakening the regime. On the other hand, it is difficult to decide whether its eventual breakdown was the result of a revolution or whether the regime simply collapsed because its structures had eroded. The gerontocratic and monopolistic nature of the GDR elite, which left it completely out of touch with East German socio-economic realities, supports the assumption of a regime collapse.

Compared to the elite transformation that took place in West Germany after 1945, the one in East Germany after 1989 was much more far-reaching. This was partly inevitable given the age structure of the SED elite and the near-total SED control of all organizational life.⁶ Private business had been nearly wiped out during several waves of nationalization. The so-called 'bloc parties' enjoyed only formal independence and were in fact closely affiliated with the SED. Similarly, there existed no independent voluntary associations, but only the mass organizations created by the SED for the purpose of a comprehensive mobilization of society, e.g. the trade union federation (*Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*, ADGB), cultural organizations (*Kulturbund*, *Schriftstellerverband*), the youth organization FDJ and the women's organization. The bloc parties as well as the other organizations had officially acknowledged the leading role of the SED. In elections, all candidates had been included on joint

candidate lists (*Einheitslisten*) and the distribution of seats among them had been determined beforehand. The only organizations that had been able to retain at least a certain degree of autonomy were the Protestant and the Catholic churches. But since the majority of the East Germans are without religious denomination, church influence was limited.

In the 1980s, a dissident movement had begun to form under the umbrella of the Protestant Church and among the ranks of artists and writers. But its opportunities for organized activity had been rather limited. It was only after the numbers of legal and illegal emigrations began to swell in late summer of 1989 that the dissidents became more assertive and new parties (SDP, BFD, etc.) began to form. During the short period between fall 1989 and spring 1990, the bloc parties and mass organizations reorganized and claimed autonomy for themselves. This reorganization involved the replacement of the old leaders by younger members. Additionally, new political parties and voluntary organizations proliferated, and the media increasingly claimed independence from political control. The elite structure became more pluralistic.

Elite transformation did not stop after the short transition period in late 1989, but even accelerated in 1990. From the beginning of 1990 on, however, the development was increasingly shaped by the dynamics of the German unification process. To understand this, one has to take into account the unique situation of two German states on the territory of the former German Reich. Separate statehood had not eliminated feelings of national unity. Such feelings were particularly strong in the GDR, and many East Germans set their hope for an improvement of the political and economic conditions on West German aid (cf. Baylis 1991). The official West German policy had contributed to keeping these expectations alive. West Germany had never officially recognized a separate citizenship of the GDR. GDR citizens coming to West Germany were automatically entitled to all benefits of (West) German citizenship, including medical insurance and old-age pensions. Professional and academic degrees were recognized, too. Throughout the period between 1945 and 1989, there had been a steady migration (legal and illegal) of East Germans to the West. Even the fortification of the border in 1961 had not been able to stop this. With the worsening of the economic situation in the GDR in the 1980s, the numbers of migrants had substantially increased, culminating in the massive emigration wave of late summer 1989.

After the opening of the German–German border, attempts to preserve an independent GDR were unsuccessful because the condition of the East German economy did not allow movement along a path of independence. Already in December 1989, federal chancellor Helmut Kohl announced a 10-point plan for accomplishment of the reunification of the two Germanies. The former bloc parties started to revive their ideological and historical ties to the West German parties. All East German political parties and voluntary associations prepared mergers with their West German counterparts.⁷

It was obvious that the unification of the two Germanies could not be on equal terms, but would proceed under the auspices of West Germany. After all, state socialism in East Germany had broken down while West Germany was an economically powerful and politically stable country. But this imbalance was also due to differences in size since West Germans outnumber East Germans by a ratio of about 4:1 (1989: 62.1 million to 16.6 million). This West German preponderance also applied to the mergers of political parties and voluntary organizations. It was even true in cases of reverse numerical relations. At the time of their merger with the West German FDP, for instance, both the LDPD and the NDPD had a much larger nominal membership than the FDP. But still the East German party branches were only represented by 260 delegates, while the West German ones could send 402 delegates to the first joint party convention (Niclauss 1995: 108). Apart from (mostly) smaller size, the East German organizations also disposed of a less well-developed organizational infrastructure and were further weakened by having to cope with turbulent internal conflicts arising from the transition process.

The fundamental elite transformation in East Germany after 1945 had been accomplished by deliberately accepting a slower pace of reconstruction. After 1989, the second pattern mentioned by Edinger (1960) dominated. Given the shortage of leadership candidates who were able to work effectively within the new political and economic structures, vacant positions were frequently filled with West Germans, i.e. there existed widespread ‘elite transfer’ from West to East Germany. It was made possible by the peculiar constellation of Germany’s division and contributed to a rapid and effective transformation of political and economic structures in East Germany. At the same time, however, that elite transfer has been perceived as a kind of ‘colonization’ and has fostered feelings of alienation among East Germans. Consequently, East Germany today disposes of only a few

indigenous leadership figures who can serve as objects of identification, and nostalgia for the old system – according to Huntington a problem of all post-authoritarian nations – is especially widespread in East Germany.

The data of a new German elite study carried out in 1995 reveal the degree of East German under-representation within the elite of the united Germany. Only 11.9 per cent of the elite respondents are of East German origin, i.e. lived in the GDR before 1989. This proportion is highest within the political elite (32 per cent) and lowest in the military (0 per cent), the business (0.4 per cent) and the civil service (2.5 per cent) elites (Bürklin 1996). At first sight, these figures seem to indicate an over-representation of East Germans within the political elite. In fact, however, this is a methodological artifact of the positional method used to select respondents. Most political leadership positions can be found at the state level, and since the East German states are much smaller in size (five out of 15, disregarding Berlin) this results in comparatively more state executive positions (*Landesregierungen*) in the East German states. Moreover, since the PDS is represented in all of the East German but in none of the West German state parliaments, there are also more parliamentary parties and parliamentary party leaders in the East German states.⁸

According to Putnam's (1976) 'law of increasing disproportion', it can be expected that the representation of members of underprivileged social groups decreases the more we move up in the political hierarchy. This is also borne out in the case of East German representation in today's political elite. East Germans are best represented at the local level where long-term residence is normally a precondition for achieving a mandate in local councils (cf. Redlingshöfer and Hoffmann-Lange 1996). Similarly, the first East German state parliaments elected in 1990 included only 2.4 per cent West Germans (Derlien and Lock 1994: 87). Among the members of the East German state political executives, however, the number of West Germans is much higher. During the election period of 1990–94 nearly two-fifths (18 out of 53) of the ministers and (temporarily) three out of five minister presidents came from West Germany. Finally, East Germans are also underrepresented at the national level. If one disregards the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism), the successor party to the SED which has continued to be predominantly East German, only seven (16.7 per cent) East Germans belong to the leadership of the parliamentary parties in the current Bundestag. Among the 42 members of

the federal government (ministers plus parliamentary state secretaries) only five (9.5 per cent) come from the East. Nevertheless, compared to other sectors, politics is the elite sector with the highest proportion of East Germans.⁹

With regard to pre-1989 party memberships and political offices, the transformation of the East German political elite has been substantial. The old political leadership – including well-known reformers, such as Hans Modrow – was removed from its positions of power. Less than half of the state parliamentarians elected in 1990 had been members of the SED or one of the bloc parties before 1989, and only about one tenth had held a political office (Derlien and Lock 1994: 75 ff.).¹⁰ Even the SED/PDS has undergone a massive leadership exchange. This was first symbolized by the replacement of Egon Krenz by Gregor Gysi as party chairman in late 1989. Despite his long-term membership in the SED, Gysi had never held political office before, but had worked as defence attorney and defended many dissidents before GDR courts.¹¹ Only slightly more than a third of the PDS deputies in the present Bundestag had already been SED members before 1990 (11 out of 30). This figure is fairly small, even if we exclude the seven West German members of the group from consideration. Another 11 had held political or administrative positions in the GDR, but these positions had been at the local or regional level only.¹² Most of them are fairly young and had worked as teachers or academics before 1990. They come from a professional background that is totally different from that of the old SED leadership. In looking at the biographies of these persons, it is difficult to imagine that this new PDS leadership could be capable of any conspiracy against the democratic political order. On the other hand, continuity at the lower political levels has been much higher within the PDS than within the other East German parties.

The previous dissident movement has not played much of a role as a recruitment reservoir for the new East German elites. One reason for this is that the opposition movement in East Germany had been especially weak. It is probably more important that these opposition groups lacked the political experience and the organizational basis which would have been necessary to form competitive political parties. Moreover, the dissidents mostly acted out of idealistic motives, without having a clear idea of the kind of political system they sought to promote and without really aspiring for political power. This political irrelevance of former dissident groups is not limited to East Germany, but can be found in other Eastern European countries as well.

According to Srubar (1994) it is a consequence of the peculiar situation of such groups in totalitarian regimes. Lacking the opportunity for developing effective organizations, the basis for their public influence rests on their prestige as uncompromising critics of the old regime. After the collapse of the regime, however, they are caught in a dilemma between 'ethics of conviction' (*Gesinnungsethik*) and 'ethics of responsibility' (*Verantwortungsethik*). If they decide to pursue a political career, they have to engage in the political bargaining typical for democratic politics which many of them consider as betrayal of the political ideals they had been striving for.

Only one of the various East German opposition groups, *Bündnis '90*, succeeded in gaining at least moderate electoral success. However, its leadership soon recognized that the group could survive only by allying itself with the West German Green Party. The two parties merged in 1993. A few former dissidents, among them Manfred Stolpe, Wolfgang Thierse (both SPD) and Rainer Eppelmann (CDU), found their way into the leadership of one of the established political parties. Others, Bärbel Bohley and Jens Reih among them, have held on to their old ideals and have become outspoken critics of parliamentary democracy which in their eyes has little to do with their idea of democracy. Still others have moved out of national or state politics and decided to work at the local level. The great majority of the former dissidents, however, have given up politics in favour of pursuing their professional careers (Pollack 1995: 41).

The new German elite study of 1995 also gives an account of the structure of other elite sectors (cf. Bürklin and Rebenstorf 1996). Given formal qualification requirements, it is not surprising that elite transfer from West to East Germany was most pronounced in the public administration. Apart from the fact that most of the federal administration has remained in Bonn, the share of West Germans among the state secretaries in the East German state governments amounts to about one-third. In the academic and the media elites, that share comes even closer to one-half. In other sectors, such as business, voluntary associations, military and the judiciary, no elite transfer was necessary, since practically all major companies, interest associations, military units, and federal courts have remained in the West. This may change, however, with the transfer of governmental institutions to Berlin (planned for 1999).

For some sectors, one has to widen the perspective to a broader stratum of leadership positions in order to grasp the entire scope of elite transfer. Thus, only one-fifth of the directors of East German

enterprises privatized by the *Treuhandanstalt* and only one-quarter of the judges at the labour courts in the East German states are East Germans (Solga 1996: 104). Within the state ministerial bureaucracies, the share of West Germans is particularly high within those departments that require legal training, e.g. the ministries of justice, economics and finance. It is lower in the ministries that deal primarily with such technical matters as agriculture, environmental questions, or traffic (cf. Derlien 1993: 328). Assuming that the holders of these lower-ranking positions provide the pool for recruiting future top elites, it may take several decades until the under-representation of East Germans in the German elite can be overcome.

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR A THEORY OF ELITE TRANSFORMATION

Elite structure is certainly not the only causal factor in explaining political change. It is, however, a crucial part of social structure, and inasmuch tells us something about the range of options available to particular elites and the stability of political systems. An encrusted elite structure that does not correspond, or no longer does so, with the socio-economic structure of society creates pressures towards a fundamental change of the political institutions that have fostered, if not created, that encrustation. For the GDR, this was the case from the very beginning. While East Germany seems to be a unique case that is probably not very relevant for other countries, the West German experience is more relevant for democratizing countries. It shows that a stable democracy can be created without importing elites from outside.

A fundamental transformation of the political elite is certainly the most crucial precondition of any successful democratization, because only a new political elite can credibly demonstrate a break with the old system and fulfil the expectations of the democratic segments of the citizenry. This implies the creation of a competitive party system. The previously dominant party has to lose its privileges. But since the development of a polarized multiparty system implies the risk of governmental instability, it is necessary to avoid both extremes.

In West Germany after 1945, the presence of the Western occupational powers enforced the complete disbandment of the Nazi party. Even though the SED did not disappear altogether after 1989, it lost its previously dominant position for several reasons. First, it was

largely discredited because of its responsibility for the poor economic performance of the GDR. Moreover, it was stripped of most of its substantial financial assets. And thirdly, because of large-scale help they received from West German parties, the other parties soon became competitive. Thus, if it wanted to survive, the SED/PDS was forced to undergo a fundamental reorganization and find its place as one among several parties. In both cases, outside help was therefore crucial in the development of a competitive party system.

Another important precondition of democratization is the breaking up of the fusion of social spheres that is typical of totalitarian and authoritarian systems. This implies the formation of a pluralistic elite structure with a variety of autonomous and mutually cooperative elites (cf. Aron 1950; Field and Higley 1980; Huntington 1991). However, since democracy implies respect for the recruitment autonomy of independent organizations, the political opportunities for enforcing large-scale elite transformation in the non-political sectors are limited. Moreover, since incumbents of elite positions are required to have a record of professional expertise, pragmatic considerations will normally prevent extended purges among the elites.

On the other hand, it can be assumed that if the new political elite proves capable of providing stable political leadership, the elites of other sectors will normally be inclined to accept a democratic political framework, even if they themselves do not hold democratic values. A high degree of elite continuity in the non-political sectors therefore seems to be no fundamental obstacle to democratic consolidation. By promoting the rapid reconstruction of an effective public administration and economic recovery, it may ironically even promote democratic consolidation (cf. Higley *et al.* 1996).

Apart from politics, there are two other sectors in which elite continuity may impair or at least slow down the consolidation process. One of them is the mass media system. The continued monopoly of state-owned broadcasting networks and of newspapers that are closely affiliated with the old ruling party may preserve old power structures and undermine the equality of political competition. Today, however, this seems to be of decreasing relevance since the internationalization of the mass media has made the maintenance of media monopolies more difficult if not impossible. The second institution is the judiciary. In Germany, an utterly conservative judiciary survived two world wars. During the Weimar Republic, its reluctance to prosecute right-wing extremists contributed to weakening the democratic forces and helped the Nazis come to power. Similarly,

during the first 20 years of the Federal Republic, the authoritarian political bias of the judiciary remained notorious. In East Germany, this problem was solved through the transfer of judges from the West.

Generally, a high degree of elite continuity implies that individuals with a pre-democratic political socialization continue to play an important role in public life. This continuity contributed to preserving pre-democratic structures and value orientations in West German society throughout the 1950s and well into the 1960s. It was not until the students' movement of the late 1960s that these patterns were fundamentally challenged and that the old elites were eventually replaced by a new generation of elites whose members had already been socialized under democratic conditions and who shared a genuinely liberal-democratic value system.

NOTES

1. The following are the major studies dealing with German elites that are based on systematically collected data: Zapf (1965) for the period of 1919–69; Best (1988, 1989) for 1867–1933, Edinger (1960) for 1956, and Hoffmann-Lange (1992) for 1968–81. Additionally, the historical analysis of Bendix (1978) includes scattered evidence on German elites before World War I. Dahrendorf's (1967) well-known analysis of German elite structure is entirely based on the data collected by Zapf who was his student, but makes much more sweeping generalizations about the character of the German elite than does the latter.
2. A similar conceptual question arises with regard to the inclusion of dissident movements in the elite concept. On the one hand, if such movements enjoy widespread public support, they do fulfil the central criterion of elite status. But on the other hand, under a non-democratic regime their influence derives entirely from their ability to mobilize dissent and they are not part of the established elite network. If, after the fall of the non-democratic regime, such a movement proves able to establish itself as a successful political party, it seems evident that this indicates elite change rather than continuity.
3. The numbers for the war years are smaller, since about one-tenth of the elites had served in the military between 1944 and 1945. Therefore, 1940 was taken as the year of reference.
4. In 1946, the Social Democratic Party was forced to merge with the Communist Party to form the SED. This was done to improve the democratic legitimacy of the SED. From the beginning, however, the SED was dominated by the communists, while SPD traditions did not play any role in it.

5. *Kurt Hager* (b. 1912): SED secretary for ideology, 1954–89.
Erich Honecker (1912–94): chairman of the SED and of the state council, 1971–89. *Erich Mielke* (b. 1907): minister of state security, 1957–89.
Horst Sindermann (1915–90): president of the GDR parliament (Volkskammer), 1976–89. *Willi Stoph* (b. 1914): prime minister 1964–73, 1976–89.
6. At the same time, the SED regime was definitely much less repressive than the Nazi regime. Especially in the second half of the 1980s, GDR citizens were increasingly able to openly criticize the regime without incurring any sanctions. Although everyone knew about the activities of the state security apparatus (Stasi), only few guessed how comprehensive the system of supervision was and that it included files on nearly half of the GDR citizens.
7. For the LDPD that represented the liberal tradition, and for the East German CDU that had originally formed in close association with the West German CDU, the West German counterparts were obvious. Two parties that did not have such counterparts in West Germany, i.e. the Democratic Farmers' Party (DBD) and the East German National Democratic Party (NDPD) merged with the CDU and the FDP respectively.
8. Finally, the response rate was higher among East German politicians, too.
9. The figures for the parliamentary party leadership of the different parties are the following:

	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
CDU/CSU	14	2
SPD	12	3
FDP	6	1
Alliance 90/the Greens	10	1
PDS	1	5

Source: Handbook of the 13th Bundestag.

10. Similarly, only one-third of the city council members in Jena since 1990 had already been members of a political party before 1989, and only slightly more than a tenth had held a political or administrative office in the old GDR (Redlingshöfer and Hoffmann-Lange 1996).
11. However, Gysi has variously been accused of having been a collaborator of the state security apparatus (Stasi).
12. The highest was that of a member of a party committee at the county level.

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