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### From interest groups to parties: The change in the career patterns of the legislative elite in German social policy

Christine Trampusch<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Max Plank Institute for the Study of Societies,  
Cologne, Germany

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# From Interest Groups to Parties: The Change in the Career Patterns of the Legislative Elite in German Social Policy

CHRISTINE TRAMPUSCH

*Analysing the careers of members of the Bundestag Standing Committee for Labour and Social Affairs, the paper demonstrates that the ties between social politicians and social policy organisations such as trade unions, faith-based social policy organisations, independent charity organisations, works councils and social insurance institutions have become blurred. Since the 1990s social politicians have become more focused on political careers in the party and in parliament than on social policy. The new social politicians are party politicians who have distanced themselves from the interest groups. The qualitative change in parliamentary personnel is explained by changes in electoral politics, parties and interest groups. The author argues that the weakening linkages confirm contemporary research results on change in German neo-corporatism.*

Contemporary analysis of the German political economy identifies changes in the relations of the institutionalised cooperation between organised labour, organised business and government which were a core element of the welfare state during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>1</sup> The main argument of this discussion is that the central pillar of German neo-corporatism, 'the independent governance by the representatives of social sectors at the behest of or under the general supervision of the state',<sup>2</sup> is crumbling because of an overall trend of erosion of the organisational strength of business and labour.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the research points to a growing role of the German government in defining reform agendas.<sup>4</sup>

Although the close cooperation between government and socio-economic interests has been for a long time the primary concern of empirical and theoretical studies on the German model,<sup>5</sup> the question whether change in social partnership goes hand in hand with change in those actors who decide on welfare state reforms, namely the social policy makers in parliament, has not yet been posed. Studies of careers and patterns of recruitment form a central element of contemporary sociological and political scientist research.<sup>6</sup> However, only a few empirical studies have focused on the relationship between the Bundestag and interest groups<sup>7</sup> and just one single study has analysed the development of the legislative or executive elites in social policy.<sup>8</sup> Taking into account also the centrality social policy has recently achieved in the party-political debates in Germany as well as in research on German politics,<sup>9</sup> a detailed analysis of the political actors in this policy field seems to be more than justified.

The paper tries to take arguments about change in the German model further by examining the representational links between major political parties and

extra-parliamentary collective actors in the social policy field. Thereby, it takes a long-term perspective on the development of the linkages between political elites and interest groups. To analyse these linkages the article examines the career patterns of the members of the Bundestag Standing Committee for Labour and Social Affairs between 1972 and 2002. The focus will be on: (1) the members' links with social policy organisations, namely with trade unions, business organisations, faith-based social policy organisations, independent charity organisations, works councils, supervisory boards and social insurance institutions, measured by overlapping memberships, interlocking directorates and occupational crossovers; and (2) on the average number of months representatives spent as members of the Committee (average length of service in the Committee). Both aspects are indicators to measure career paths followed by the politicians. A weakening of links signals functional differentiation, thus a divide between politicians and social policy organisations and a tendency of politicians to pursue politics as a professional career. A decrease in the members' length of service implies that it is more likely that the politicians have significant ambitions to follow their political career also outside the social policy field. Therefore, the questions that will be addressed are: Was there a change in the career patterns? Did the linkages between politicians and social policy organisations change? And, did the time periods the representatives spent in the Committee decrease?<sup>10</sup>

The central result of my analysis is that the members' careers show a trend of weakening linkages between politicians and social policy organisations. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Committee members had strong links with social policy organisations. In the 1990s, the careers of social policy experts in the Bundestag showed a trend towards generalised professionalisation, which is not only characterised by fewer affiliations with social policy organisations but also by the fact that representatives' length of service in the Committee decreased. I conclude that in the field of social policy a new generation of politicians came to the fore: the Committee is now filled with members for whom their professional career as a politician stands in the foreground and for whom social policy is just a means to achieve a career in politics. In the 1990s, German social politicians had less professional experience in social policy and more professional experience in politics. However, we can observe clear differences between the two major parliamentary groups, the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU).<sup>11</sup> Despite these differences between the parties and although as regards some indicators, for example membership in trade unions, faith-based social policy organisations or leadership position in social policy organisation, the links of one or both parliamentary groups reveal more stability than change, the article claims that the relations between politicians and social policy (organisations) seem to be institutionalised to a lesser degree nowadays than was the case in the past. On the basis of recent research into the party system, trade unions and business organisations in Germany, this article explains the professionalisation through reference to fundamental changes which took place in the party system and in the socio-economic interest organisations in the 1990s.

The article proceeds in three steps. In the first section, I will describe the data and variables used in this paper as well as the career patterns for the whole period. In the second section, the focus will be on presenting the historical development of the career patterns. This will be in the form of time-series graphs, which differentiate between all

members (including the FDP and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen), the members of the SPD and those of the CDU/CSU. The third section interprets the results against the background of recent research on parties and interest groups. In addition, it discusses implications for future research. Based on the evidence of weakening links between social politicians and socio-economic interest groups, I conclude that a differentiated analysis is needed of how interest groups rearrange their political and economic activities in order to represent their social policy demands. In addition, I claim that the effects of the elite change on social policy reforms are unclear.

#### DATA, VARIABLES AND CAREER PATTERNS

Collecting data on the members of the Standing Committee for Labour and Social Affairs has proved to be far from easy. Complete information on the biographical backgrounds of the representatives is difficult to find if one wants to consider the professional careers of the members of parliament, and their political or functionary activities in parties, interest organisations or social insurance institutions before they were elected to the Bundestag.<sup>12</sup> For a more in-depth analysis we selected the period 1972 to 2002. The analysis starts with the seventh and ends with the fourteenth legislative period. The data file encompasses the biographical data of 174 representatives who were members of the Committee at any one time during this period. Sixty-four are members of the parliamentary group of the SPD, and 78 are members of the parliamentary group of the CDU/CSU.

In order to analyse the links of the members of parliament with social policy organisations the paper uses socio-demographic and political variables that are indicators of four modes of links (see appendix): (1) links which describe overlapping memberships of the representatives and social policy organisations; (2) links describing interlocking directorates, thus the leadership positions occupied by the representatives in social policy organisations before being elected to the Bundestag and while on the Bundestag; (3) links describing occupational crossovers, thus the occupational background of the representatives before being elected to the Bundestag; (4) reinforced links through the representatives enjoying a leadership position in the party or in the parliamentary group while on the Committee. The fourth indicator measures the importance of strong (or weak) links between politicians and social policy organisations: with strong links the influence on political decisions will be the greater the more Committee members are in a leadership position in the party or in the parliamentary group. This applies above all to representatives who hold leadership positions in the party as well as in the parliamentary group.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, a weakening of the links will have the greater impact on political decisions the more members have no affiliations with social policy organisations and the more of these members of parliament belong to the elites of the party and the parliamentary group. Besides these four modes of links, I analyse the development of the average number of months politicians spent as members of the Committee.<sup>14</sup>

Over the whole period the careers show that, with regard to membership of a trade union, a faith-based social policy organisation/independent charity organisation or a works council/supervisory board, the Social Democratic social politicians have stronger links than the Christian Democratic social politicians: While 88 per cent of

TABLE I  
CAREER PATTERNS BETWEEN 1972 AND 2002

Mode of link	Variable	Total		SPD		CDU/CSU	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
(1) Interlocking memberships	UNION	82	47.1	56	87.5	18	23.1
	CAPITAL	28	16.1	3	4.7	20	25.6
	SOCIAL	48	27.6	31	48.4	15	19.2
	AFA or CDA/CSA			15	23.4	23	29.5
(2) Interlocking directorates	LEAD POS	43	24.7	16	25.0	23	29.5
	CO-DET	51	29.3	27	42.2	21	26.9
(3) Occupational crossover	BLUE	9	5.2	3	4.7	5	6.4
	WHITE	23	13.2	7	10.9	5	6.4
	SELF	25	14.4	4	6.3	14	17.9
	SOCIAL OCC	43	24.7	26	40.6	15	19.2
	POLITICS	28	16.1	6	9.4	18	23.1
	PUBLIC	40	23.0	13	20.3	14	17.9
(4) Leadership positions	PARTY LEAD	24	13.8	6	9.4	14	17.9
	PARL LEAD	52	29.9	22	34.4	21	26.9
		174		64		78	
(5) Average number of months	Variable TERM	n	months	n	months	n	months
		78	82.5	64	98.6	78	81.1

Note: For a description of the variables see appendix.

Source: Own calculations based on data compiled by the author on the basis of various volumes of Peter Schindler, *Datenhandbuch zur Geschichte des Deutschen Bundestages 1949–1999*, Band I, II and III (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 1999); Rudolf Vierhaus and Ludolf Herbst (eds.), *Biographisches Handbuch der Mitglieder des Deutschen Bundestages 1949–2002*, Band 1, A–M, Band 2, N–Z (München: K.G. Saur Verlag, 2002); and Munzinger *CD-Rom Archiv*, 10/2001, augmented by other publications and documents which have been supplied via the Internet and from the parties and parliamentary groups.

the SPD social politicians are members of a trade union, only 23 per cent of the Christian Democrats members are trade unionists. While 48 per cent of the SPD social politicians are members of a faith-based social policy organisation or an independent charity organisation, in the Christian Democratic parliamentary group only 19 per cent are members. While 42 per cent of the SPD social politicians are active on a works council or supervisory board before serving in the Bundestag, only 27 per cent of the Christian Democratic social politicians are members.

In addition, Social Democratic representatives worked more frequently than their CDU/CSU counterparts in social policy organisations before being elected to the Bundestag. Of the 64 SPD social politicians 26, i.e. 41 per cent, changed from a full-time occupation outside parliament, where they could gain practical experience with the implementation of social policy measures, to a parliamentary job in the Bundestag. This is only the case with 19 per cent of the Christian Democratic social politicians. SPD social politicians are more influenced by social policy as an occupation than Christian Democratic social politicians.

Of course, CDU/CSU social politicians too have an institutionalised link with social policy organisations. The data shows that 30 per cent of the CDU/CSU social politicians are members of the intra-party interest group Christian Democratic Employees. In the case of the SPD members this is around 6 per cent lower.<sup>15</sup> One-quarter of

the CDU/CSU social politicians are members of an interest organisation close to capital. What is also remarkable is that Christian Democratic social politicians occupy more leadership positions in a trade union, in an interest organisation close to capital, in a faith-based social policy organisation or in an independent charity organisation than the Social Democratic legislative elite.

However, on the whole, links with social policy organisations are more common for SPD social politicians than for the Christian Democratic members of parliament. This impression is confirmed by the fact that among the 78 Christian Democratic social politicians 23 per cent moved exclusively from a party-political career (party, legislative mandate) to the Bundestag. Only 9 per cent of the Social Democratic social politicians followed this path. Briefly, the CDU/CSU social politicians are more focused on political careers in the party and in parliament than the SPD members.

To what extent are the strong and weak links between the representatives and the social policy organisations strengthened by leadership positions in the party and in the parliamentary group? Although CDU/CSU social politicians belong *ex officio* to the parliamentary group executive commission,<sup>16</sup> during their Committee incumbency SPD social politicians more frequently occupy a leadership position in the parliamentary group than CDU/CSU social politicians. In contrast, CDU/CSU social politicians more frequently occupy a leadership position in the party than SPD social politicians.

How much time did the representatives spend in the Committee? The length of service in the Committee can serve as an indicator of the degree of the political institutionalisation of the policy field. The more time representatives spent in the Committee, the more they become social policy experts and the less they tend to switch between political issues. In relation to the length of service in the Committee, Social Democrats spent much more time on social policy. Whereas their average length of service in the Committee is 99 months, the average length for the Christian Democrats is 81 months.

If one disaggregates the analysis by examining the historical development of variables, it becomes clear that for both parliamentary groups the commitment of the members of parliament to social policy decreased during the period under review. In the 1970s and 1980s links were much stronger than in the 1990s.

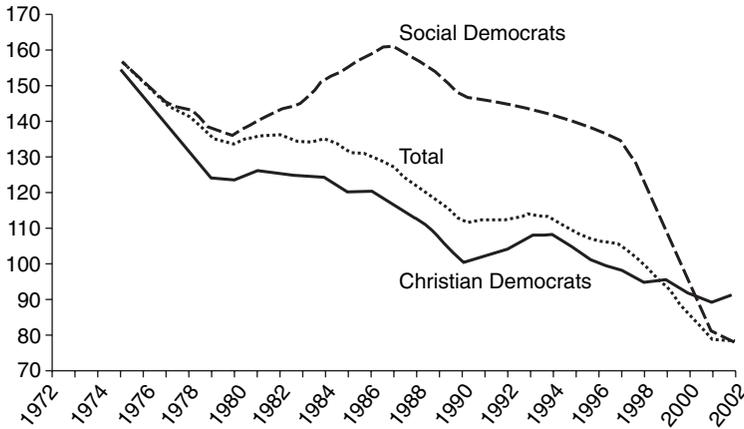
#### THE CHANGE OF THE CAREER PATTERNS BETWEEN 1972 AND 2002

In this section, I will analyse the links over time and describe some of the major trends and changes, using some of the variables just described.<sup>17</sup> First, I will summarise the main trends that can be concluded from the data. Second, I will present the data in the form of time-series graphs with a moving four-year average, differentiating between all members (including the FDP and Bündnis90/Die Grünen), the members of the SPD and those of the CDU/CSU.<sup>18</sup>

Although as regards some indicators, for example membership in trade unions, faith-based social policy organisations or leadership positions in social policy organisations, the links of one or both parliamentary parties reveal more stability than change, indicators also show a trend towards functional differentiation between polity and society (see Figures 1 to 11). While in the 1970s and 1980s German social politicians made long-term commitments to social policy and its institutions, in the 1990s they had

FIGURE 1

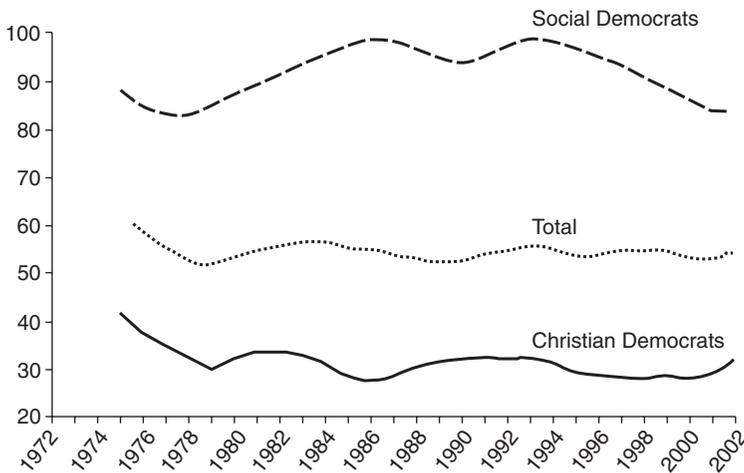
TERM: AVERAGE LENGTH OF SERVICE IN THE BUNDESTAG COMMITTEE FOR LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS IN MONTH, 1972 TO 2002, MOVING FOUR-YEAR AVERAGE (THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF MONTHS THE REPRESENTATIVES SPENT IN TOTAL IN THE COMMITTEE)



fewer affiliations. Beyond that, the graphs indicate that the linkages changed differently for the Social Democratic parliamentary group and the Christian Democratic representatives. Regarding the occupational background, especially Christian Democratic representatives appear to have focused more on their political careers in the party and in the parliament since the 1990s (see Figures 7 to 9). Furthermore, for the CDU/CSU members, membership in a faith-based social policy/independent charity

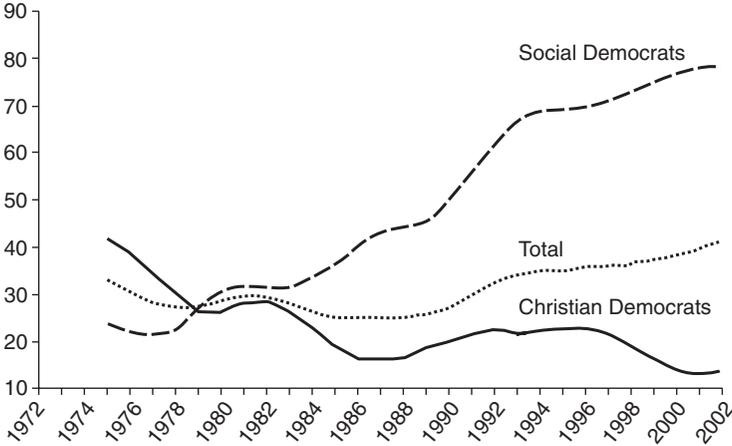
FIGURE 2

UNION TRADE UNIONISTS ON THE BUNDESTAG COMMITTEE FOR LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, 1972 TO 2002, EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE MEMBERS, MOVING FOUR-YEAR AVERAGE



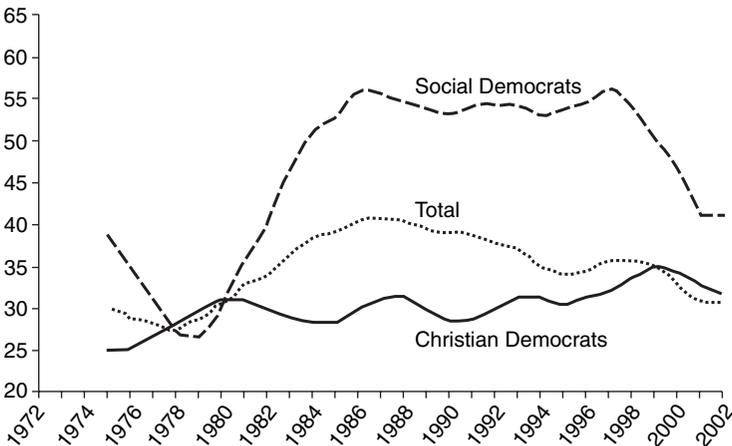
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FIGURE 3  
 SOCIAL: MEMBERS OF A FAITH-BASED SOCIAL-POLICY ORGANISATION, OF AN INDEPENDENT CHARITY ORGANISATION, OF A REFUGEE ASSOCIATION OR OF THE VDK ON THE BUNDESTAG COMMITTEE FOR LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, 1972 TO 2002, EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE MEMBERS, MOVING FOUR-YEAR AVERAGE



organisation (see Figure 3) as well as membership in an interest group close to capital (see Figure 6) have visibly decreased, while their ties to trade unions (see Figure 2) and to works councils or supervisory boards (see Figure 4) have remained relatively stable. On the other hand, the Social Democrats' linkages have weakened more with regard to

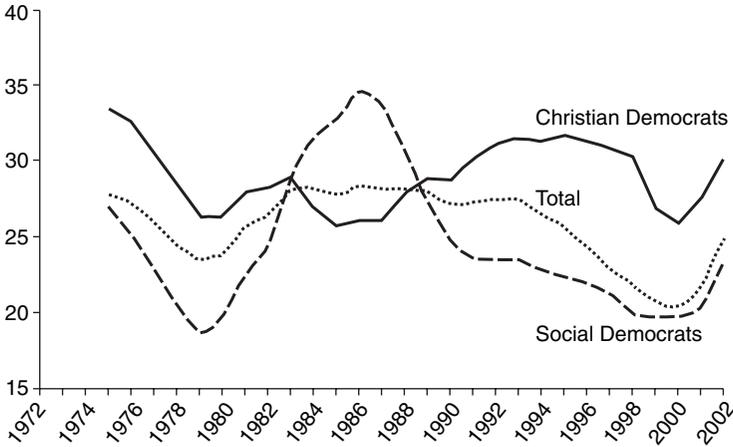
FIGURE 4  
 CO-DET: MEMBERS ON WORKS COUNCILS OR SUPERVISORY BOARDS (BEFORE ELECTED ON THE BUNDESTAG OR DURING INCUMBENCY IN THE BUNDESTAG) ON THE BUNDESTAG COMMITTEE FOR LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, 1972 TO 2002, EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE MEMBERS, MOVING FOUR-YEAR AVERAGE



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FIGURE 5

LEAD POS: MEMBERS WITH A LEADERSHIP POSITION IN A TRADE UNION, AN INTEREST ORGANISATION CLOSE TO CAPITAL OR A FAITH-BASED SOCIAL-POLICY ORGANISATION, AN INDEPENDENT CHARITY ORGANISATION, A REFUGEE ORGANISATION OR IN THE VDK ON THE BUNDESTAG COMMITTEE FOR LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, 1972 TO 2002, EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE MEMBERS, MOVING FOUR-YEAR AVERAGE

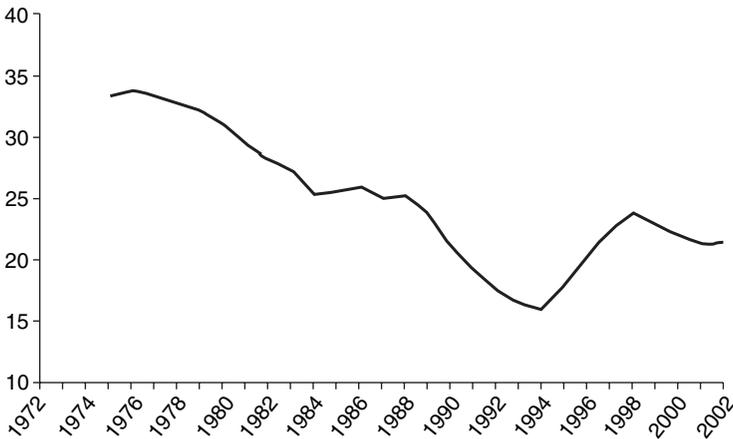


their membership in works councils and supervisory boards (see Figure 4) and with regard to leadership positions in interest groups (see Figure 5).

The weakening of the links points to the fact that, in contrast to the 1970s and 1980s, there is no relatively homogeneous group with common experience in the implementation of social policy that defines the political reform agenda in the

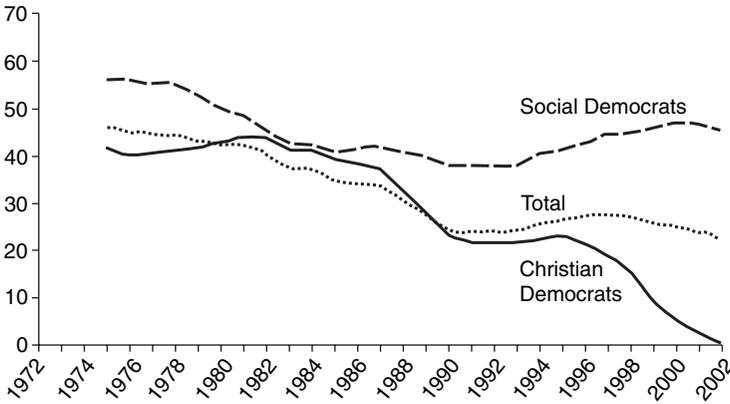
FIGURE 6

CAPITAL: MEMBERS OF AN INTEREST ORGANISATION CLOSE TO CAPITAL ON THE BUNDESTAG COMMITTEE FOR LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, 1972 TO 2002, EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE MEMBERS, MOVING FOUR-YEAR AVERAGE, CDU/CSU



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FIGURE 7  
 OCCUPATIONAL BACKGROUND OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BUNDESTAG COMMITTEE FOR LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, 1972 TO 2002, EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE MEMBERS (SOCIAL OCC = OCCUPATION IN SOCIAL INSURANCE INSTITUTIONS, IN A TRADE UNION, IN CDA, IN AN INTEREST ORGANISATION CLOSE TO CAPITAL OR IN A FAITH-BASED SOCIAL-POLICY ORGANISATION), LAST POSITION BEFORE BEING ELECTED TO THE BUNDESTAG, MOVING FOUR-YEAR AVERAGE



1990s. In the 1990s, the careers of the social politicians started less frequently in the social policy field than in the party organisation and/or in the public or private sector. In the 1990s, the social politicians were more focused on their political career and were more electorally oriented. They had fewer links with interest organisations than was the case in the past.

FIGURE 8  
 OCCUPATIONAL BACKGROUND OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BUNDESTAG COMMITTEE FOR LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, 1972 TO 2002, EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE MEMBERS (POLITICS = OCCUPATION IN PARTY (FULL-TIME AND PAID) OR REPRESENTATIVE IN A LÄNDERPARLAMENT OR IN THE VOLKSKAMMER), LAST POSITION BEFORE BEING ELECTED TO THE BUNDESTAG, MOVING FOUR-YEAR AVERAGE

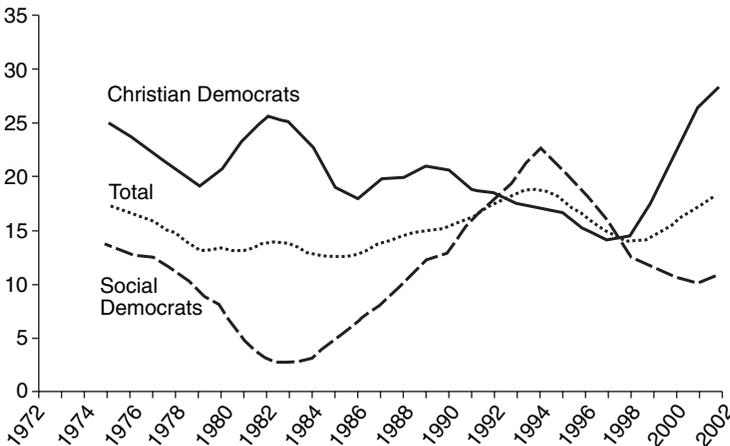
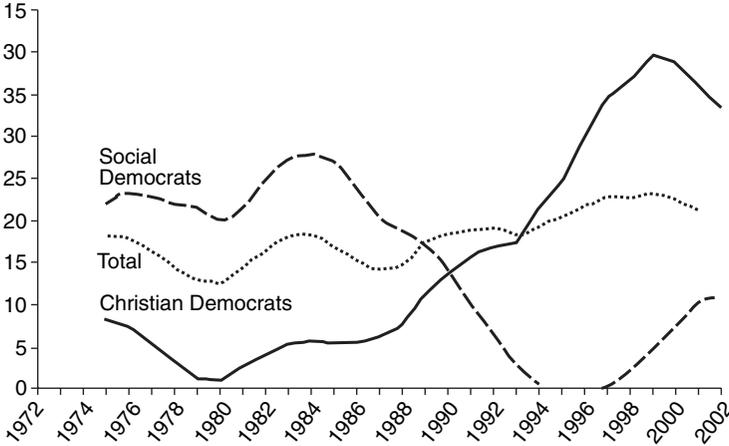
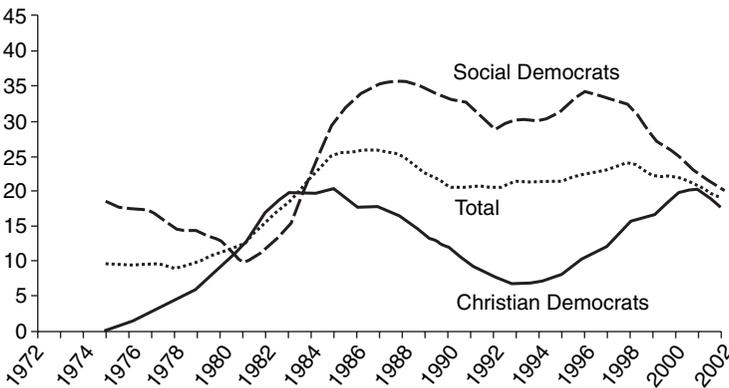


FIGURE 9  
 OCCUPATIONAL BACKGROUND OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BUNDESTAG COMMITTEE FOR LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, 1972 TO 2002, EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE MEMBERS (PUBLIC = OCCUPATION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR), LAST POSITION BEFORE BEING ELECTED TO THE BUNDESTAG, MOVING FOUR-YEAR AVERAGE



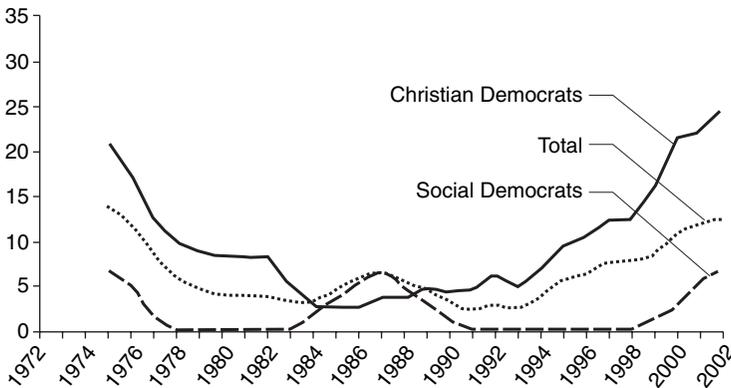
In detail, between 1972 and 2002 changes in the different modes of links between polity and society can be observed in Figure 1. The argument that representatives' ties to social policy and its extra-parliamentary actors weakened is strongly supported by the fact that the length of service in the Committee decreased visibly, for both parliamentary groups. Because the terms of office of the Bundestag representatives

FIGURE 10  
 LEADERSHIP POSITIONS OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BUNDESTAG COMMITTEE FOR LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, 1972 TO 2002, EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE MEMBERS (PARL LEAD = LEADERSHIP POSITION IN THE PARLIAMENTARY GROUP DURING INCUMBENCY IN THE COMMITTEE), LAST POSITION BEFORE BEING ELECTED TO THE BUNDESTAG, MOVING FOUR-YEAR AVERAGE



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FIGURE 11  
LEADERSHIP POSITIONS OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BUNDESTAG COMMITTEE FOR LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, 1972 TO 2002, EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE MEMBERS (PARTY LEAD = LEADERSHIP POSITION IN THE PARTY DURING INCUMBENCY IN THE COMMITTEE), LAST POSITION BEFORE BEING ELECTED TO THE BUNDESTAG, MOVING FOUR-YEAR AVERAGE



has increased steadily since the beginning of 1970,<sup>19</sup> this decrease in the average number of months representatives spent in the Committee indicates that politicians focused more on their political career in the party and in parliament than on social policy.

Throughout the whole period the proportion of trade unionists among the SPD representatives is clearly higher than among the CDU/CSU members (Figure 2). For the CDU/CSU representatives, the proportion of trade unionists peaked in the mid-1970s. For the Social Democrats it peaked in the mid-1980s and also the mid-1990s, noticeably with a sharp decrease before (!) and during German unification. Since 1993 the proportion of trade unionists in the Social Democratic parliamentary group has sunk drastically.

With respect to the number of those representatives who are members of a faith-based social policy organisation or an independent charity organisation, there is a fundamental upward trend for the Social Democrats and a clear downward trend for the Christian Democrats (Figure 3). The higher and increasing share of the Social Democrats can be explained by reference to the membership of the independent charity organisation Arbeiterwohlfahrt (AWO), an association which is close to the Social Democratic party. It is quite interesting that membership of the AWO, which was founded in 1919 by the Social Democratic representative Marie Juchacz, was lower in the 1970s than in both the 1980s and 1990s.

With regard to the share of Committee members on works councils and supervisory boards, links are much stronger for the members of the Social Democratic parliamentary group than for the members of the Christian Democratic parliamentary group (Figure 4). This was especially the case in the 1980s. However, since 1997 the share of works council members has also decreased drastically for the Social Democratic representatives. For both party groups, the weakening of the links with organisations

of co-determination is a short-term phenomenon, where the linkage of the CDU/CSU representatives turns out to be slightly more stable.

Figure 5 shows that the share of the SPD Committee members who have a leadership position in a trade union, in an interest organisation close to capital, in faith-based social policy organisation or in an independent charity organisation before or during incumbency in the Bundestag has decreased drastically since the 1980s. In contrast, among the Christian Democrats the share of members with a leadership position does not start to decrease until the mid-1990s and then rises again towards the end of the decade.

Figure 6 shows that the affiliations of the Christian Democratic representatives with interest organisations close to capital have decreased since the 1970s. This means that Christian Democrats' pattern of interest group affiliation became increasingly detached from class divisions.

With reference to the occupational background of the representatives, the main trend is that, for both party groups, the share of occupational crossovers between the social policy sector and the Bundestag has decreased, but much more strongly for Christian Democratic than for the Social Democratic members of parliament (Figure 7). In the 1980s and 1990s, the share of Christian Democratic members with occupational experience in social policy declined to zero, whereas for the Social Democratic members the share has increased between 1993 and 2000. The importance of the decrease in occupational crossovers between social policy and membership of the Bundestag for the links between polity and society becomes clear if one considers from which occupations representatives move to the Bundestag. Figures 8 and 9 show that, among the Christian Democratic members, the share of those who come from the political sector (party, mandate) or from the public sector (without social insurance) to the Bundestag rises sharply at the end of the 1990s (party, mandate) and after the mid-1980s (public sector). Thus, a trend of professionalisation can be discerned for the CDU/CSU social politicians. Politicians who move from the public sector to the Bundestag come from a sheltered sector so they have the flexibility and time to invest in a party career. Among the SPD social politicians, the proportion of those who were working in the party or were representatives before being elected to the Bundestag has strongly increased since the beginning of the 1980s. Here, in comparison to the Christian Democratic parliamentary group, a catching up movement has taken place. However, since the mid-1990s the share is declining again.

To what extent are tendencies of functional differentiation (or rather professionalisation) strengthened by the occupancy of leadership positions in the party and parliamentary group? Figure 10 shows that, since the beginning of the 1990s, among the CDU/CSU social politicians the share of those members who hold a leadership position in the parliamentary group during their membership of the Committee has increased strongly. In contrast, among the Social Democrats the share has decreased strongly over the same period, though it increased steeply at the beginning of the 1980s. The 1980s' links of SPD social politicians with social policy organisations went hand in hand with their occupying leadership positions in the parliamentary group. In the 1990s, the weakening of the links was accompanied by decreasing occupancy of parliamentary group leadership positions. In contrast, in the 1990s, the

professionalisation of the CDU/CSU social politicians was reinforced by their occupying leadership positions in the parliamentary group. Regarding the party leadership positions (see Figure 11), for the Christian Democratic members it can be stated that these strengthened both the linkages with social policy organisations (until the mid-1980s) and the professionalisation of the politicians (starting from the beginning of the 1990s).

#### CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHANGING LINKAGES

In the 1970s and 1980s, social politicians were not merely powerful actors in the parties and the parliamentary groups.<sup>20</sup> My analysis of the careers of the members of the Committee for Labour and Social Affairs shows that they also had close links to social policy organisations. However, the links between social politicians and social policy organisations have weakened since the beginning of the 1990s. There has been a tendency towards a functional differentiation of polity and society. Social politicians now have fewer affiliations with social policy organisations and less experience in the implementation of social policy. Social politicians are concentrating more on their own political careers and are more electorally oriented. The question is how we can explain these weakening links between parties and interest groups. Below I argue that the contemporary debate on changes in the party system, trade unions and business organisations can provide useful hints for potential explanatory mechanisms.

There is no overall common sense view adopted in the research as to whether party alignment became weaker and electoral volatility stronger in Germany.<sup>21</sup> However, the number of SPD and CDU members decreased drastically in the 1990s.<sup>22</sup> In addition, it seems to be evident that the link between political parties and their voters and societal groups has changed in recent decades.<sup>23</sup> Steven Padgett describes a 'relative classlessness', which he attributes to the weakening of socially structured partisanship coupled with an increasing potential for volatility.<sup>24</sup> According to him, left-wing parties, in particular, lost their partisans.<sup>25</sup> However, Padgett's judgement contradicts that of Herbert Kitschelt, who points to differences in partisan alignments between the East and West German electorate.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, a recent analysis of the Bundestag elections between 1969 and 1998 has led to the conclusion that the effect of short-term influences, such as the influence of party issue competencies, on electoral choices has increased.<sup>27</sup> Thus, parties enhance their electoral success if they support issues which are relevant for the voters.

Even though recent research findings take no clear-cut stance on changes in partisan alignments in Germany, from the perspective of political parties, the weakening of the links between parties and interest groups may be the result of the increasing share of professional politicians in parties, government and parliament.<sup>28</sup> The literature offers two explanations for this professionalisation trend. First, it may be caused by the strategic decision of party leaders to marginalise the influence of interest groups in the parties, with the aim of widening the power of the party leaders.<sup>29</sup> Another possible causal factor for the increased share of professional politicians might be changed voter and interest groups preferences. Thus, Herbert Kitschelt states that nowadays party election strategies have to react more strongly to voter preferences, which either develop spontaneously or are produced by the mass media or political entrepreneurs

outside the arena of party competition.<sup>30</sup> Kitschelt argues that parties have to redefine their programmatic appeals and change their electoral competition strategies in response to contemporary economic, political and social changes.<sup>31</sup> In this context, the weakening of the links between social politicians and social policy organisations might originate from the emergence of new social risk groups, which reflects change in voters' attitudes and preferences towards social policy. These groups have emerged as a result of the structural transformation of employment and changing gender roles and family relations, which have led to a new distribution of material life chances and pose risks to income maintenance.<sup>32</sup>

The hypothesis that the weakening of links between social politicians and social policy organisations can be attributed to changing linkage patterns between parties and interest groups is not only supported by research on parties and voters but also by literature on change in the German interest group system. Research on German trade unions and business organisations clearly shows that conflicts of interests within these organisations intensified in the 1990s.<sup>33</sup> This intensification of conflicts signals a diversification of interest groups' interests and preferences, which in the end weakens the collective power of interest groups to act and build up stable patterns of territorial representation with politicians.

Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s the umbrella organisations, DGB and BDA, were able to bring the heterogeneous interests of their affiliates in line with a common denominator, in the 1990s industrial trade unions and business organisations became more and more cut off from common demands in social policy. On the employers' side new divisions between large and small enterprises on the one hand and between suppliers and customers on the other arose in response to the intensified international price competition. On the trade unions' side, as a result of long-term unemployment, the pressure to redefine the unions' role in collective bargaining in response to its decentralisation and the political discourses on the reform necessities of German social policy, conflicts between striking and non-striking unions and between conflict-oriented and more consensus-oriented unions increased.<sup>34</sup> Within the employers' organisations, representatives of the *Mittelstand*, i.e. of small and medium-sized firms, explicitly demanded a decentralisation of collective bargaining and a substantial reduction of non-wage labour costs and welfare transfers.<sup>35</sup>

Inside the trade unions' umbrella organisation, DGB, with the metalworking union IG Metall and the services union Verdi on the one hand and the chemical union IG BCE on the other, cleavages on the reform of the welfare state intensified. Because these three trade unions comprise three-quarters of the DGB members, each conflict between the three weakens the political power of the DGB and thus the leverage of its social policy demands. In addition, the number of trade union members declined drastically in the last decade. At the end of 2002, the DGB comprised just 7.7 million members, i.e. 20 per cent of employees. Fifteen years ago this share was still 30 per cent. Nowadays, only 10 per cent of employees under the age of 25 are members of a trade union.<sup>36</sup> In 2003, 118,625 members left IG Metall,<sup>37</sup> while in 2002 only 43,302 members quit the union.<sup>38</sup>

To sum up, what causal mechanisms for change in the alliance between the legislative elite and social policy organisations are suggested by contemporary research findings on parties, trade unions and business organisations? There are indications

that diversified voter and interest group preferences have an impact on both changes in electoral strategies of parties and the weakening of the collective power of interest groups to act. Future research on party systems, electoral politics and interest groups should try to find out whether these conclusions are plausible. It should do so not only by trying to discern causal mechanisms between preference formation, specific forms of union-party links, and electoral politics, but also by exploring how interest groups rearrange their political and economic activities in order to represent their social policy demands. Three questions should be focused upon: Are employers and trade unions changing from corporatist actors to lobbyists? Are unions and employers investing more time and energy in reaching collective agreements on social policy issues? And is politics producing less beneficial outcomes for social partners because their territorial representation is weakening?

Taking into account additionally the centrality that social policy has gained during the reform of the German political economy, a question that also needs to be addressed is whether the change in the political elite will have an influence on policy change. Regarding this aspect, further research should test the following two hypotheses. On the one hand, the decline of representational links between extra-parliamentary collective actors and the parliamentary groups of Germany's major political parties might increase the electoral uncertainty for parties and decrease the incentives for the party leadership to pursue fundamental social policy reforms.<sup>39</sup> Thus, increased intra- and inter-party competition diminishing the chances of reaching party-political consensus could be the result. On the other hand, weakened ties to social policy organisations could make reforms easier because parties are no longer obliged to find compromises with these veto-players.

## APPENDIX

## LIST OF VARIABLES

Career pattern	Variable	Description of the variable
(1) Overlapping memberships	UNION	Member of a trade union
	CAPITAL	Member of an interest organisation close to capital: chambers, agricultural organisation, industrial association, employers' association, professional association of the self-employed, or other business organisation
	SOCIAL	Member of a faith-based social-policy organisation ( <i>Kolping</i> , <i>Katholische Arbeitnehmerbewegung</i> ), an independent charity organisation ( <i>Arbeiterwohlfahrt</i> , <i>Charitas</i> ), a refugee association or <i>Verband der Kriegsbeschädigten, Kriegshinterbliebenen und Sozialrentner Deutschlands</i> (VdK)
	AFA	Member of the SPD intra-party interest group, Association of Employee Affairs ( <i>Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Arbeitnehmerfragen</i> , AFA)
	CDA	Member of the CDU intra-party interest group, Christian Democratic Employees ( <i>Christlich-Demokratische Arbeitnehmerschaft</i> , CDA)

(Continued)

APPENDIX *CONTINUED*

Career pattern	Variable	Description of the variable
	CSA	Member of the CSU intra-party interest group, Christian Social Employees ( <i>Christlich-Soziale Arbeitnehmerschaft</i> , CSA)
(2) Interlocking directorates	LEAD POS	Leadership position in a trade union (UNION), in an interest organisation close to capital (CAPITAL) or in a faith-based social-policy organisation or in an independent charity organisation (SOCIAL) before being elected to the Bundestag or while on the Bundestag; leadership position means: chairman, member of the board, vice-chairman, district chairman, regional chairman
	CO-DET	Member of a works council or supervisory board before being elected to the Bundestag or while on the Bundestag
(3) Occupational crossover last job position before being elected to the Bundestag	BLUE	Occupation as blue-collar worker (private sector)
	WHITE	Occupation as white-collar worker (private sector)
	SELF	Self-employed
	SOCIAL OCC	Occupation in a trade union (UNION), in an interest organisation close to capital (CAPITAL), in a faith-based social-policy organisation or in an independent charity organisation (SOCIAL), in VdK or in a social insurance institution (public employment service, social security office, pension and health insurance)
	POLITICS	Occupation in party (full-time and paid) or representative in a state parliament ( <i>Landtag</i> ) or in the parliament of former East Germany ( <i>Volkskammer</i> )
(4) Leadership position in party or parliamentary group during incumbency in the Committee	PUBLIC	Occupation in the public sector
	PARTY LEAD	Leadership position in party during incumbency in the Committee; leadership position means: chairman, deputy chairman or other member of the party executive commission and secretary-general of the party
	PARL LEAD	Leadership position in the parliamentary group during incumbency in the Committee; leadership position means: chairman, deputy chairman or other member of the parliamentary group executive commission and parliamentary managing director of the parliamentary group
(5) Average number of months	TERM	Average number of months members spent in total on the Committee

## NOTES

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1. Wolfgang Streeck, 'From State Weakness as Strength to State Weakness as Weakness: Welfare Corporatism and the Private Use of the Public Interest', *MPIfG Working Paper* 03/2 (Köln: Max-Planck-Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung, 2003); Wolfgang Streeck, 'No Longer the Century of Corporatism. Das Ende des "Bündnisses für Arbeit"', *MPIfG Working Paper*, 03/4 (Köln: Max-Planck-Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung, 2003); Wolfgang Streeck and Anke Hassel, 'The Crumbling Pillars of Social Partnership', in H. Kitschelt and W. Streeck (eds.), *Beyond the Stable State* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), pp.101–24.
2. Peter J. Katzenstein, *Policy and Politics in West Germany: The Growth of a Semisovereign State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), p.58.
3. Streeck and Hassel, 'The Crumbling Pillars'.
4. Mark. I. Vail, 'The Myth of the Frozen Welfare State and the Dynamics of Contemporary French and German Social-Protection Reform', *French Politics* 2 (2004), pp.151–83, at p.173.
5. Andrei S. Markovits, *The Politics of the West German Trade Unions: Strategies of Class and Interest Representation in Growth and Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Katzenstein, *Policy and Politics*.
6. Heino Kaack, 'Die soziale Zusammensetzung des Deutschen Bundestages', in Uwe Thyaysen, Roger H. Davidson and Robert G. Livingston (eds.), *US-Kongreß und Deutscher Bundestag. Bestandsaufnahmen im Vergleich* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1988), pp.128–51; Thomas Saalfeld, 'Professionalisation of Parliamentary Roles in Germany: An Aggregate Level Analysis, 1949–94', in Wolfgang C. Müller and Thomas Saalfeld (eds.), *Members of Parliament in Western Europe: Roles and Behaviour* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), pp.32–54; Franziska Deutsch and Suzanne S. Schüttemeyer, 'Die Berufsstruktur des Deutschen Bundestages – 14. und 15. Wahlperiode', *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 34/1 (2003), pp.21–32; Heinrich Best, Christopher Hausmann and Karl Schmitt, 'Challenges, Failures, and Final Success: The Winding Path of German Parliamentary Integrated Elite 1848–1999', in Heinrich Best and Mauricio Cotta (eds.), *Parliamentary Representatives in Europe 1848–2000. Legislative Recruitment and Careers in Eleven European Countries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.138–95; Christopher Anderson, 'The Composition of the German Bundestag since 1949: Long-Term Trends and Institutional Effects', *Historical Social Research* 18/1 (1993), pp.3–25.
7. Thomas Saalfeld, 'Germany: The Bundestag and Interest Groups in a "Party Democracy"', in Philip Norton (ed.), *Parliaments and Pressure Groups in Western Europe* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), pp.43–66.; Martin Sebaldt, 'Interest Groups: Continuity and Change of German Lobbyism since 1974', in Ludger Helms (eds.), *Institutions and Institutional Change in the Federal Republic of Germany* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp.188–204; Martin Sebaldt, *Organisierter Pluralismus: Kräftefeld, Selbstverständnis und politische Arbeit deutscher Interessengruppen* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1997); Manfred Hirner, 'Der Deutsche Bundestag im Netzwerk organisierter Interessen', in Dietrich Herzog, Hilke Rebenstorf and Bernhard Weßels (eds.), *Parlament und Gesellschaft. Eine Funktionsanalyse der repräsentativen Demokratie* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1993), pp.138–83.
8. Only Weßels gives a short overview of the links between representatives of the Committee for Labour and Social Affairs and the interest organisations of this policy field. Although he analyses data from 1949 to 1985, he does not precisely study the development over time. In addition he merges data on three committees: the Committee for Labour and Social Affairs, the Committee on Economic Policy and the Committee on Budget Policy; see Bernhard Weßels, 'Kommunikationspotentiale zwischen Bundestag und Gesellschaft. Öffentliche Anhörungen, informelle Kontakte und innere Lobby in wirtschafts- und sozialpolitischen Ausschüssen', *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 18/2 (1987), pp.285–311; see also Bernhard Weßels, 'Germany', in Pippa Norris (ed.), *Passages to Power. Legislative Recruitment in Advanced Democracies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.76–97.
9. For this see for example Stephen Padgett, 'Welfare Bias in the Party System: A Neo-Downsian Explanation for Gridlock in Economic Reform', *German Politics* 13/2 (2004), pp.360–83; Reimut Zohlnhöfer, 'Destination Anywhere? The German Red-Green Government's Inconclusive Search for a Third Way in Economic Policy', *German Politics* 13/1 (2004), pp.106–31; Thomas Saalfeld, 'Party Identification and the Social Bases of Voting Behaviour in the 2002 Bundestag Election', *German Politics* 13/2 (2004), pp.170–200.
10. The paper does not empirically explore the question how the representational links and career patterns of all representatives in the Bundestag have changed. Therefore, it is not concerned with whether changed linkages in the social policy field simply reflect general trends in the Bundestag or changed linkages express particularities of social policy, or not. The focus here is on long-term developments in social policy. For making arguments about change, the reference points are the 1970s and 1980s.
11. The explanation of the differences between parties goes far beyond the scope of this article. To address this question a detailed historical investigation of the development of linkages between parties and extra-parliamentary collective actors would be necessary. In this article, general evidence for the

- professionalisation hypothesis stands in the foreground. However, further studies should closely consider divergent developments between political parties.
12. The analysis is based on data compiled by the author on the basis of various volumes of Peter Schindler, *Datenhandbuch zur Geschichte des Deutschen Bundestages 1949–1999*, Band I, II und III (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 1999), Rudolf Vierhaus and Ludolf Herbst (eds.), *Biographisches Handbuch der Mitglieder des Deutschen Bundestages 1949–2002*, Band 1, A–M, Band 2, N–Z (München: K.G. Saur Verlag, 2002) and Munzinger *CD-Rom Archiv*, 10/2001, augmented by other publications and documents which have been supplied via the Internet and from the parties and parliamentary groups. A complete description of the variables and their sources can be ordered from the author.
  13. For this argument see Herbert Kitschelt, *The Transformation of European Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.221.
  14. In addition to the above-mentioned variables, I analysed the development of the representatives' average age in the end of each legislative year. Regarding this indicator, it is interesting to note that the development of the Committee members' average age reflects the development of all Bundestag representatives' average age. For the average age of Bundestag deputies between 1949 and 1990 see Anderson, 'The Composition of the German Bundestag', pp.4–6.
  15. However, one has to take into account that the intra-party interest group of the SPD, the 'Association of Employee Affairs', was not created until 1973 (see Hella Kastendiek, *Arbeitnehmer in der SPD. Herausbildung und Funktion der Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Arbeitnehmerfragen (AfA)* (Berlin: Verlag Die Arbeitswelt, 1978).
  16. Due to the working rules for the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, committee members who are chairmen of working groups of the parliamentary group belong *ex officio* to the extended parliamentary group executive commission (see on this Schindler, *Datenhandbuch zur Geschichte des Deutschen Bundestages*, pp.945–47, 970–73).
  17. Due to the small number of case studies I will not analyse the development of membership of the intra-party interest groups AFA, CDA and CSA and the occupational crossover from blue-collar worker (BLUE), white-collar worker (WHITE) and self-employment (SELF).
  18. Because of the small number of case studies, the graphs must be interpreted carefully. Even small changes in the linkage values can result in strong upward or downward trends in the graphs. One can also address the question whether German unification and the entry of eastern politicians into the Bundestag influenced the development of the linkages. However, as the share of the representatives elected and socialised in East Germany is quite small (between 1990 and 2002 only 16.5 per cent of the Committee members were East Germans), any radical influence of German unification on the development of the linkages seems to be doubtful. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that between 1990 and 2002, among the eastern Committee members, the share of those who came from jobs in the public sector increased from 30 to 60 per cent, indicating a growing professionalisation of this group.
  19. For long-term trends in the average length of service in the Bundestag since 1949 see Anderson, 'The Composition of the German Bundestag', pp.6–7.
  20. See Thomas von Winter, 'Die Sozialausschüsse der CDU. Sammelbecken für christdemokratische Arbeitnehmerinteressen oder linker Flügel der Partei?', *Leviathan* 18/3 (1990), pp.390–416; Reimut Zohlnhöfer, 'Parteien, Vetospieler und der Wettbewerb um Wählerstimmen: Die Arbeitsmarkt- und Beschäftigungspolitik der Ära Kohl', *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 42/4 (2001), pp.655–82, pp.42–43.
  21. Hans-Dieter Klingemann and Jacob Steinwede, 'Traditionelle Kerngruppenbildung der Wähler in der Bundesrepublik', in Hans-Dieter Klingemann and Wolfgang Luthardt (eds.), *Wohlfahrtsstaat, Sozialstruktur und Verfassungsanalyse* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1993), pp.49–65, at p.65; Thomas Saalfeld, 'The German Party System – Continuity and Change', *German Politics* 11/3 (2002), pp.99–130, at p.124; Hendrik Zorn, 'Parteiidentifikation in Ostdeutschland. Entstehung und Dynamik psychologischer Parteibindungen in den neuen Bundesländern', Magisterarbeit Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, I, Institut für Politische Wissenschaft, February 2003, p.86. For this debate, see in addition Roland Czada, 'Konkordanz, Korporatismus und Politikverflechtung: Dimensionen der Verhandlungsdemokratie', in Everhard Holtmann and Helmut Voelzkow (eds.), *Zwischen Wettbewerbs- und Verhandlungsdemokratie. Analysen zum Regierungssystem der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2000), pp.23–49, at pp.41–42; Bernhard Weißels, 'Gruppenbindung und Wahlverhalten: 50 Jahre Wahlen in der Bundesrepublik', in Markus Klein, Wolfgang Jagodzinski and Ekkehard Mochmann (eds.), *50 Jahre Empirische Wahlforschung in Deutschland. Entwicklung, Befunde, Perspektiven, Daten* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2000), pp.129–58, at p.129; Stephan Scheurer and Fabian Wildenauer, 'Issue-Kompetenz, Sozialstruktur und Parteiidentifikation bei den deutschen Bundestagswahlen 1969 bis 1998' (Zürich, 2003), [http://www.ipz.unizh.ch/personal/tim/yScheurer\\_Wildenauer.pdf](http://www.ipz.unizh.ch/personal/tim/yScheurer_Wildenauer.pdf).

22. See Wilhelm P. Bürklin, Viola Neu and Hans-Joachim Veen, *Die Mitglieder der CDU*. Interne Studie Nr. 148/1997 (Sankt Augustin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 1997), p.19; Oskar Niedermayer, 'Parteimitgliedschaften im Jahre 2002', *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 34/2 (2003), pp.382–88.
23. Klaus von Beyme, *Parteien im Wandel: von den Volksparteien zu den professionalisierten Wählerparteien* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2000); Saalfeld, 'The German Party System', p.100.
24. Stephen Padgett, 'Germany: Modernising the Left by Stealth', *Parliamentary Affairs* 56/10 (2003), pp.38–57, at p.47.
25. *Ibid.*, p.50.
26. Herbert Kitschelt, 'Political-Economic Context and Partisan Strategies in the German Federal Elections, 1990–2002', in Herbert Kitschelt and Wolfgang Streeck (eds.), *Beyond the Stable State* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), pp.125–52, at pp.141–43.
27. Scheurer and Wildenauer, 'Issue-Kompetenz'.
28. Jens Borchert (ed.), *Politik als Beruf: die politische Klasse in westlichen Demokratien* (Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 1999); Jens Borchert, *Die Professionalisierung der Politik: zur Notwendigkeit eines Ärgermisses* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2003); Saalfeld, 'Professionalisation of Parliamentary Roles'; Klaus von Beyme, *Die politische Klasse im Parteienstaat* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993); Wolfgang Ismayr, *Der Deutsche Bundestag: Funktionen, Willensbildung, Reformansätze* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1992). Ismayr, *Der Deutsche Bundestag*, pp.53–54 defines professional politicians as members who, prior to their election to the Bundestag, had been employees of parties or parliamentary parties, political appointees in the civil service, employees in government think-tanks, former members of state parliaments or former members of state governments.
29. Hence the cartel party hypothesis, which was developed by Richard Katz and Peter Mair and which maintains that there is a decrease in the linkages between parties and society, see Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair, 'Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: the Emergence of the Cartel Party', *Party Politics* 1/1 (1995), pp.525–34. For an empirical examination of the thesis, see Thomas Poguntke, 'Zur empirischen Evidenz der Kartellparteien-These', *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 33/4 (2002), pp.790–806.
30. Herbert Kitschelt, 'Citizen, Politicians, and Party Cartellization: Political Representation and State Failure in Post-Industrial Democracies', *European Journal of Political Research* 37/2 (2000), pp.149–79, at p.164.
31. *Ibid.*, p.159.
32. Herbert Kitschelt and Philipp Rehm, 'New Social Risks Constituencies and Political Parties', paper presented at conference on 'The Political Regulation of New Social Risks', Lugano, 25–27 Sept. 2003.
33. Streeck, 'From State Weakness'.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Christine Trampusch, 'Institutional Resettlement. The Case of Early Retirement in Germany', in Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen Thelen (eds.), *Beyond Continuity: Explorations in the Dynamics of Advanced Political Economies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.203–28.
36. Bernhard Ebbinghaus, 'Dinosaurier der Dienstleistungsgesellschaft? Der Mitgliederschwund deutscher Gewerkschaften im historischen und internationalen Vergleich', *MPIfG Working Paper* 02/3 (Köln: Max-Planck-Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung, 2002).
37. *FAZ*, 16 March 2004, p.11.
38. *Spiegel Online*, 10 July 2003.
39. This interpretation goes in line with Saalfeld's argument on the effects of decreasing party identification on policy gridlock, see Saalfeld, 'Party Identification'.