

Clément Desrumeaux, “Electoral Campaign or Permanent Campaign? British and French MPs’ Political Work and Electoral Work (1997-2007)”

This paper examines the idea - practically a matter of common sense among journalists - of "permanent campaign", a new phenomenon in the political life of these two countries. After recounting the recent history of this idea, the author records the opinions of British and French MPs who recognise that the distinction between non-electoral political periods and campaign periods has ceased to exist or has become particularly problematic. However, when examining the MPs' engagement diaries (a strategy worthy of praise), the author does observe variations in their political work.

Essentially what we see in this paper is, in my view, a transformation of what we should understand by election campaign. The idea of "permanent campaign" puts strain on the boundary between electoral and routine politics, with both the register of MPs' activities and journalists' performative messages helping to construct the idea of "permanent campaign" (this issue is related to the recent book of Narud and Esaiasson, “Between-Election Democracy: the Representative Relationship after Election Day”, ECPR Press). Three questions (some lateral) come to mind on reading this paper:

- 1) Assuming that the campaign period is definitively characterised by the idea that it is permanent, what impact can the use of money (public or private) have in locking in a campaign period that never ends? Or, in other words, is it not possible to see in this idea of permanent campaigning a new way to eliminate rivals and a new source of political inequality since it implies investing money and time which we know to be scarce resources?
- 2) Apart from saying that there is an important element of self-fulfilling prophecy in this idea of permanent campaigning, how can we explain its acceptance as common sense and, therefore, its implementation in practice? Is it not the result of a field effect where the mere fact of the representative of a particular constituency acting as a permanent candidate forces possible contenders to act in the same way? But, if there is a field effect, in what exactly does it consist? Is it only a matter of the contagion effect of agents' activities or, in the field effect, are there more structural dynamics that cannot be easily explained? To put it briefly, in what could a field effect consist in this case?
- 3) Finally, as regards the distinction between the politics side and the policy side (which is very similar to that made by Papadopoulos between front-stage and back-stage in his 2012 book “Democracy in Crisis”), if permanent campaigning really exists, this would mean that MPs give ever more priority to the politics side, consolidating the dominance of bureaucracies and specialised technocracies in management of the policy side. Would this not be a terribly perverse effect of permanent campaigning?

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Yoav Shemer-Kunz, "Individual Membership in Europarties. Evidence from the European Greens"

On reading this paper, the main question that comes to mind is the extent to which Europarties are parties. They are parties built on a top-down logic or, in other words, as the deliberate creation of "opportunistic" players on the scale of the European Union. This raises the question of whether they are not, in the end, artifacts.

The author convincingly shows how the attribution of the label of "party" to Europarties is neither neutral nor natural (it is in this sense that they seem artifactual constructions). This is so much the case that the author says that "as top-down constructions, Europarties are in need for recognition and legitimacy from outside the EU institutions". I wonder why. Isn't it possible to imagine that these "parties" can exist artifactually in a way different from national parties?

Although the author shows us how Europarties reproduce the practices of "real parties" in their internal life (opening speeches, plenary debates, etc.), what should we understand by "real" parties (an expression the author uses several times)? It seems to me that, in the distinction between Europarties and "real" parties, a reflection needs to be made about reality and fantasy, what it means to represent and the functions of parties-artifacts.

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Martin Baloge, Giuliano Bobba, Marino De Luca and Antonella Seddone, "The Public Image of Candidates and Parties during Primary Election Campaigns. A Comparison between the Italian and French Cases"

It seems to me that there are number of connections between this paper and that on the idea of permanent campaigning.

This paper talks about the spread in two countries of a procedure for selecting candidates that is often viewed as a possible virtuous solution to the problems of disaffection, the quality of democracy and the legitimacy of its results. Based on analysis of press content and agents, the authors show how primary elections become, first, an interesting object, then one that is desirable and, finally, praiseworthy. Can we infer from this a similar effect on voters? In this method of analysis, isn't there an assumption that readers view the information they are offered on its same terms? For example, that a text's negative or positive tone means a negative or positive reaction on the part of its readers. How should we study reaction to and acceptance of political innovations and, in this case, primaries? Perhaps one way would be to analyse other types of material such as letters to the editor (published and unpublished)?

But, in addition and making the connection to the "permanent campaign" paper, to what extent is the appearance of the idea of "permanent campaign" a result of the spread of primary elections?

And, on a deeper note, how has it been possible for primary elections to become established as a normal mechanism without taking into account their effects in terms of the exclusion of women and of the middle and popular classes, precisely because it increases the economic and social costs of campaigns (where money and time are scarce resources)?

Again, we may be witnessing the spread of a mechanism that could be the result of a field effect that would need to be explained. Indeed, the authors themselves use the expression "contagion effect".

This is an interesting paper that raises many questions.

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