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Origin and Development of Modern British Political Parties

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Abstract: Britain is the origin of modern political parties and party systems. Since the beginning of the bourgeois revolution of Britain in 1640, there was a long struggle between royalty and anti-royalty and the realignment and regrouping of various political forces strengthened the power of the bourgeoisie in parliament. Those who represented the interests of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois new aristocracy were called “the Whig Party”, while those who represented the interests of the old aristocracy were called “the Tories” (Conservative Party; Tory was an insulting word of Irishmen meaning “outlaw”). Although both parties were still limited to parliamentary activities and did not have national public organizations and systems, they were the earliest origins of the British political parties.

In the 1760s, the Industrial Revolution broke out in Britain. During this period, capitalism developed rapidly with continuous changes within the bourgeoisie. Under such circumstances, the Tories became the political representative of the landowners and then changed to the Conservative Party in 1833. In 1839, representing the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie, the Whig Party changed their name to the Liberal Party, striving for votes, and gaining a majority in parliament. It broke through the narrow scopes of parliament to compete for the growth of its organization throughout the country, and established its own electoral associations and other institutions. By the middle of the 19th century, both parties had established national party organizations and constructed their own organizational systems, resulting in the emergence of two major political parties directly related to modern Britain.

Keywords: Britain; Modern Political Parties; Origin; Development

1. Introduction

There have been objections in the academic circles to the establishment of modern political parties and policies in Britain, the main reason which is that the formation of British political parties and modern politics based on them have experienced a long development process, and many events have had a great impact on modern British politics. The 19th century was an important period of the development of modern British politics. There is no doubt that modern political parties and politics have been established and mature at present. This article aims to explain the historical process of the formation and institutionalization of party politics in Britain in the 19th century, so as to deepen the understanding of the British party-political system.

2. The embryonic stage of political factions

During 1660 to 1789, different political factions of modern British political parties were born. The prerequisite for the birth of British political parties is the English Reformation, which broke the authority of Catholicism and created many denominations in Britain. These denominations were transformed into political factions during the British Revolution and continued to fight against each other in parliament after the restoration of Britain, gradually evolving into several major political factions, which took turns to lead parliament. With the struggle of these factions, there appeared the Whig Party and

the Tories in 1679. These two parties played key roles in the Glorious Revolution, promoting the emergence of a polarization of political factions. All this laid the foundation for the formation of modern political parties.

3. The formation of two major political camps

From 1689 to 1760, it was a period of polarization in the formation of modern political parties in Britain. The emerging the Whig Party and the Tories were the main contenders for the leadership of parliament during 1689 to 1714. In this process, the trend of polarization occurred. It is definitely inseparable from the historical background at that time. By 1714, while the Whig Party was in power, the Tories fought the Whig Party as an opposition party, leading to the polarization of the political factions. After 1750, the enthronement of George III deepened the polarization. The emergence of political polarization is a prerequisite for that of modern political parties in Britain, that the development of British political parties in this period provided the conditions for the formation of modern British political parties in the future.

4. Attempt to hold power in turns

From 1760 to 1832, it was the period of expansion of modern political parties in Britain. During this period, with the occurrence of the Industrial Revolution, the American Revolution and the French Revolution, the wave of independence and democratization in Britain was constantly fierce, and the polarization of British political parties was consolidated and developed. Factional politics was turned into party politics. At the same time, political struggle was increasingly intense. The pattern of two leading groups taking the lead in expanding systems arose. These two leading groups were the Tories who had emerged from the William Pitt the Younger's group, and the Whig Party who had emerged from the Fawkes' group. The two groups had their own organizations and political views, which were conservative and liberal respectively. The development conditions of these political parties made possible the transformation of the Tories and the Whig Party into modern political parties, namely the Conservative Party and Liberal Party.

5. The progressive perfection of modern political party systems

The period from 1832 to 1868 was the institutionalization of modern political parties in Britain. First of all, two new political parties emerged, namely the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party. Second, dependence of political parties on the House of Commons increased and the virtual monarch politics occurred. Third, the responsibility cabinet system became complete. All these contributed to the emergence of modern British political parties and finally the transformation from political factions to modern political parties completed.

6. Conclusion

This article explores the history of British political parties from 1660 to 1868, pointing out that political factions created through the Reformation gradually became political parties with modern operating systems during this period. Through the discussion of the periods of factions, polarization, development and institutionalization experienced by the British political parties, the following conclusions are obtained.

By 1868, political organizations almost belonged to dignitaries, who expanded political influence by frequent communication with others. First of all, there were parties and leaders who supported the parliament and the cabinet, including speakers of the cabinet and leaders of the opposition. They were joined in the constituency by capitalist entrepreneurs—the so-called electoral economic men, whose appearance were inevitable under modern British legislations guaranteeing fair elections.

The purpose of such legislations was to campaign spending and end the power of money by requiring candidates to disclose their campaign expenses. Among leaders and the authority within the party, the British party leaders played important roles in the distribution of power in parliament and the country. That foundation approximated to the truth. In other words, only by relying on them can the whole country draw up stable political strategies with focusing on the overall situation. However, parliamentary groups and party grandees still wielded considerable influence.

The old party organizations contained a part of nobility and a part of corporate businesses involving office workers. But since 1868, the Cox system has evolved. Local election in Birmingham was popularized nationally, which was supported by secular ministers and Joseph Chamberlain and with the help of the democratization of election. In order to win over the masses, it had to become as large an institution as a democratic organization. In addition, rival groups should be established in constituencies of various cities to continue organizing activities, and administered everything in a strictly bureaucratic manner. With firm moral belief, the institution won the support of notables and soon an organization following the mass line appeared on the political stage.

In addition to economic opportunities, there are opportunities to satisfy personal vanity for competent politicians at the Cox meeting. JP and even M.P. shared the same ideas and great ambitions. If these people could show their good culture, that is to say, they were gentlemen, they could achieve their purposes. This system had an important influence on the development of British political parties. The only thing a member of parliament should do was not to vote or go against the party. He must be present when being called by parliament and act on orders of leaders of the cabinet or opposition parties. If there is a strong leader, Cox is under his absolute control. It is an unprincipled institution, a dictator who appeals directly to the people over the parliament, and can be called as “a dictatorship reflecting emotions of the masses”.

To sum up, the origin and development of modern British political parties are closely related to the overall development of British society. With the development of capitalist economy, great changes have taken place in the social structure of Britain, resulting in the continuous development of the political democratization of Britain. Influenced by such huge historical trends, political parties in Britain have gradually followed the operation mode of modern political parties, and then finally become modern political parties.

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