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Gellner, Winand

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THE POLITICS OF POLICY
"POLITICAL THINK TANKS" AND THEIR MARKETS
IN THE US-INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

*Problem solving, Group
Research institute U.S.*

by
Winand Gellner
Universitat Trier, West Germany

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"It is, no doubt, a part of the genius of the American political culture that so many of these organizations are able to flourish, and work in so many different junctures of the public and the private sectors, feeding so many differently constituted elite groups and publics, and drawing on so many diverse scholars and sources of financial support. And it is no wonder that thoughtful inhabitants of other democratic systems, whose elite political cultures provide far less diversity of this sort, wish they could transplant some seeds from at least a few of these remarkable institutions to foreign soil."

Nelson W. Polsby: Tanks but no tanks. In: Public Opinion, April/May 1983, p.59.

The Politics of Policy

"Political Think Tanks" and Their Markets in the US-Institutional Environment*

by

Winand Gellner (May 1990)

UNTIL AUGUST 1990: 910 Peralta Ave
Albany, CA 94706

AFTER SEPTEMBER 1990:

Office:

Universität Trier, West Germany
Postfach 3825
D-5500 Trier
0651-201-2136/2123 (Secretary)

Home:

Kaseler Weg 5
D-5500 Trier
West-Germany
0651-10349

"RISK SOCIETIES" AND THE MARKET OF EXPERT-ELITES

"Thinkers" and "experts" are influential elites in modern industrial societies of the western world. In regard to the political system, one of their main concerns is the provision of knowledge for policy decisions. However, most important issues of policy "must be based on assessments of *risk, uncertainty, and trade-offs*," and "virtually all important policy decisions require judgements about the relative desirability of trade-offs between different values."¹ Therefore, policy decisions are almost always risky at best, because a choice has to be made among alternative policies, whose potential consequences cannot be precisely estimated:

"If the consequences were certain, some of the anguish of decisionmaking would vanish. But what is so dismaying is the terrible risk of the outcomes. (...). The outcomes are not merely risky in the sense that we can assign a definite probability to each, as we can when we toss properly made dice. The outcomes are genuinely uncertain in the sense that we can at best only guess at probabilities over a large, vague range."²

In these instances, the competence of experts diminishes because unambiguously right answers do not exist. This ambiguity in certain issue areas is also sensed by the public. Issues with global significance are of particular concern and create high risk awareness, for example, environmental issues (e.g. greenhouse effect), ethical issues (e.g. gene technology), energy issues (e.g. nuclear power), economic issues (e.g. world debt crisis), social issues (e.g. drugs and poverty), and health issues (e.g. AIDS). These are the kinds of global problems where selection of different facts or different interpretations of the same facts lead to contradictory answers: "Clearly there are not, nor can there be, "expert" answers to problems like these."³ Beck identifies as "risk societies" those

*I would like to thank David Hadwiger, Duane Oldfield and - of course - Nelson Polsby for their very useful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. A special and hearty Thank You goes to Deborah Norden and Uschi Backes-Gellner who were critical readers and commentators.

¹Robert A. Dahl: *Democracy and Its Critics*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press 1989, p.75.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p.76.

in which decisions on major issues are characterized by "expert"-uncertainty and wide-spread public perceptions of risk.⁴

As Western industrialized societies become more affluent, their citizens are increasingly less willing to accept risks. They depend on experts and expect reliable answers, which in turn shape their perceptions.⁵ But the answers often depend both on the way the alternatives are presented⁶ and the normative assumptions of the experts. It is reasonable therefore, to expect that ideological factors can play a significant role in the public's perception of risk.⁷

It would be incorrect to assume the existence of one homogenous market of experts with equally entitled players, all having the same power and offering the same products. Instead, one finds a pluralist market which can be characterized by the existence of specialized segments, where different and numerous agents produce and supply their products: ideas and ideologies. The demand-side complies to the same pattern: The users of ideas (the clients) have adjusted to the variety of supplied ideas or even generated the market diversity.

Political "idea markets" behave and are organized much like scientific expert markets. The process of policy planning and political decision making is shaped by a diverse set of ideas which are produced by different institutions. In the USA, this market is more and more crowded by institutions which are commonly called "Think Tanks" - in contrast to the policy shaping dominance of parties and administrative bureaucracies in Western European polities.⁸

⁴For a general outline of the theory cf. Ulrich Beck: *Auf dem Weg zur Risikogesellschaft*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1987.

⁵Cf. Stanley Rothman, S. Robert Lichter: *Elite Ideology and Risk Perception in Nuclear Energy Policy*. In: *APSR* 81 (1987) 2, pp. 383-385.

⁶Dahl 1989, p.75.

⁷Wildavsky and Douglas have argued that the perception of risk is a function of political cultures which indeed are based on ideologies. Cf. Aaron Wildavsky, Mary Douglas: *Risk and Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1982; Rothman, Lichter 1987, pp.383-404.

⁸Renate Mayntz: *West Germany*. In: William Plowden (Hg.): *Advising the Rulers*. Oxford, New York: Basil Blackwell 1987, pp.3-18 stresses the low significance of West-German "Think Tanks": "There are some (...) policy research institutes which serve the government collectively, but the influence of these bodies on government policy is mostly rather indirect and it would be difficult to trace specific policy decisions to their advice", because ... the West German system has

Roughly speaking one can distinguish two basic types: The true "Think Tank" and the "Political Think Tank" (PTT). A shared aspect of these institutions is their organizational status as "non-profit", tax-exempt bodies which are usually funded by contributions, contracts, and/or endowments. The true "Think Tank" is characterized by its mission to bring together researchers for a limited time, offer them space to think about self-chosen problems and discuss their ideas with colleagues. All this takes place in an environment without administrative or teaching responsibilities. These "true Think Tanks", which are not further analyzed here, must be separated from the PTTs, which are actually political "Public Policy Research Institutes",⁹ characterized by permanent staff and close connection with the policy process.

It is equally important to distinguish the PTTs from the other idea-producing institutions (universities, research institutes, foundations) in that PTTs are characterized by their deliberate and functional closeness to the policy process. In terms of the organizational status, one could differentiate them from non-political "scientific institutions" on the one side and non-scientific "interest groups" on the other. Their main concern is to influence the policy process with ideas.

A FUNCTIONAL TYPOLOGY

PTTs fulfill four different functions¹⁰ in the political process which, in Western European parliamentary democracies, are the prerogative of parties, political foundations and bureaucracies:

relatively little by way of a specialized infrastructure for policy analysis and advice." Ibid., pp.8-9. In the field of Foreign Policy she observes, that "the Foreign Office does not make much use of (...) the work of existing research institutes." Ibid., p.7. But it is in addition to the administrative bureaucracy (Bundeskanzleramt) the political party of the Bundeskanzler which is "the most obvious candidate for an alternative source of policy advice." Ibid., p.14. ⁹Polsby 1983, p.14. Cf. the typology of R. Kent Weaver: The Changing World of Think Tanks. In: PS 22 (1989) 3, pp.564-568 and the fundamental studies of Harold Orlans: The Nonprofit Research Institute. Its Origin, Operation, Problems, and Prospects. New York u.a.: McGraw-Hill 1972; Orlans (Hg.): Nonprofit Organizations. A Government Tool. New York: Praeger 1980 and Alan Ware: Between Profit and State. Intermediate Organizations in Britain and the United States. Cambridge, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989.

¹⁰Besides others not further elaborated here.

generation of ideas and ideologies, convocation (networking), publication (diffusion), and transformation (of elites).

In addition to the generation of ideas, PTTs provide infrastructures for communication and idea-exchange between politicians, administrators and "thinkers" through conferences, symposia, and the like. Similar to the process of idea generation, this network or better convocation function is provided in most Western European democracies by parties and political foundations.

Furthermore, PTTs play a vital role in the diffusion of ideas, thereby shaping the agenda-setting process. In directing their information output especially to the media and specialized publics the organizations use different channels and instruments. This function of diffusion may be filled by memos, briefs, reports, articles, papers, monographs and books.¹¹ In turn, these communities rely heavily on the news from the PTTs.

However, this is not the whole story. In addition to ideas, societies also need people who are willing to implement and act on these ideas: politicians and administrators. Again, the recruitment of these political elites is organized in most western democracies by political parties and bureaucracies. These parties act as a "safety net" as well - a "net" which serves politicians and administrators on their way back from their active career. Parties thereby supply a useful device for elite transfer in democracies. The American PTTs have taken over this party-function, as well. As regards the recruitment and the smooth, civilized (sometimes temporary) retirement of political elites they work as a "clearing-station" in the process of "in-and-out".¹² This function of "elite transfer" adds to the former functions and represents an additional, more structural "polity-function" of PTTs. These four functions describe and analyse the role of PTTs in the American political system. This is a notable contrast to the traditional model of PTTs as providers of "policy

¹¹Everet Anthony Lindquist: Behind the Myth of Think Tanks: The Organization and Relevance of Canadian Policy Institutes. Berkeley: University of California, Public Policy-Ph.D. 1989, p.23a.

¹²Werner Jann: Politik als Aufgabe der Bürokratie: Die Ministerialbürokratie im politischen System der Bundesrepublik Deutschland im Vergleich zu anderen westlichen Demokratien. In: Politische Bildung 21 (1988) 2, p.50. Cf. also Hugh Heclo: The In-and-Out System: A Critical Assessment. In: G. Calvin Mackenzie (Hg.): The In-and-Outers. Presidential Appointees and Transient Government in Washington. Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins University Press 1987, pp.195-216.

advice" and embodies thereby an innovative and elaborated political institution.¹³ However, a closer look at the strategic goals of the PTTs calls for further discrimination.

One can find three types of PTTs. The first one is represented by the traditional "public policy research institutions" like Brookings, American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the RAND Corporation. These organizations employ researchers of the university-type and -caliber, many of whom move quite often between PTTs and universities. Their research is typically embodied in books and contributions to the on-going scientific debate. However, one can also find former public officials in these organizations - taking a rest from active duties and preparing to reenter office when (or if) their party regains the power.¹⁴

Another group of PTTs is composed of the still research related but devotedly ideological type represented e.g. by the Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation and the Institute for Policy Studies. These institutions are research oriented but can be hardly separated from interest groups which also do research. Accordingly, these institutions have a keen interest in recruiting young, graduate- and trainee-type people to be trained and funneled into the administration.

Finally one can find the "policy entrepreneurs" which are even more interest-oriented and should actually be labelled "interest-research groups"¹⁵ - but which are still regarded as "Think Tanks" by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and the authors of relevant directories.

By identifying different types, it might be possible to consider the different strategic choices of PTTs in the market. Further research will have to explain the different strategies of PTTs in the more competitive and ideological market as functional requirements of the different types: How they differentiate themselves, find funding

¹³For a quick reference: Gregg Easterbrook: Ideas Move Nations. In: The Atlantic Monthly, Januar 1986, pp.66-80.

¹⁴The National Journal, 30.11.1985 presents corresponding definitions: "Think tank n 1: a nesting place for former high-level government officials waiting for their party to regain the White House 2: a university-style setting, where scholars can ruminate free from the burden of lecturing students (...)."

¹⁵These two groups are described by an additional definition of the National Journal: "an aggressively ideological institution whose young analysts synthesize the research of others, producing terse, topical papers designed for mass consumption in Washington."

and make production decisions. The preferences of institute managers, sources of funding, ways of diffusion, personnel policies, subjects etc. will serve thereby as independent variables to explain the PTT choices in the new environment.

"POLITICAL THINK-TANKS" AND THE POLICY-PROCESS

The precise position of the PTTs in the policy process¹⁶ is difficult to describe. Lindblom adopted the view that these intermediary institutions actually influence all policy phases.¹⁷ Nevertheless, a certain priority is given to the stages of "issue-identification" and "agenda-setting".¹⁸ On the other hand, Lindquist portrays a more limited functional role of PTTs. According to his view, policy networks are composed by the "decision community", the "academic community" and the so-called "third community".¹⁹ "Think Tanks" are identified as part of the "third community".²⁰ Lindquist is thereby inclined to the concept of "subgovernments" developed by J. Leiper Freeman and further elaborated by Douglass Cater and Hugh Heclo.²¹ Freeman and Cater had in mind more or less firmly structured "iron triangles" or "subgovernments" whereas Heclo's "issue networks" are characterized by flexibility:

"Iron triangles and subgovernments suggest a stable set of participants coalesced to control fairly narrow public programs which are in the direct economic interest of each

¹⁶In contrast to Thomas R. Dye: Who's Running America. The Bush Era. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall 1990, p.251, who identifies the "policy planning groups" as the actual "decision-makers".

¹⁷Charles E. Lindblom: The Policy-Making Process. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1980, p.3.

¹⁸Cf. the approach and the related case studies in Nelson W. Polsby: Political Innovation in America. The Politics of Policy Initiation. New Haven, London: Yale University Press 1984.

¹⁹Lindquist 1989, pp.107a and 109a.

²⁰Ibid., p.26a. Additional members are "staff, consultants, government councils, commissions und interest groups."

²¹J. Leiper Freeman: The Political Process: Executive Bureau-Legislative Committee Relations. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday 1955 ("policy subsystems"); Douglass Cater: Power in Washington. New York: Random House 1964 ("subgovernments"); Hugh Heclo: Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment. In: Anthony King u.a. (Hg.): The New American Political System. Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute 1978, pp.87-124 ("issue networks"). I owe credit for the information on Freeman to Nelson Polsby 1984, p.153.

party to the alliance. Issue networks are almost the reverse image in each respect. Participants move in and out of the networks constantly. Rather than groups united in dominance over a program, no one, as far as one can tell, is in control of the policies and issues. Any direct material interest is often secondary to intellectual or emotional commitment. Network members reinforce each other's sense of issues as their interests, rather than (as standard political or economic models would have it) interests defining positions on issues."²²

"Issue networks" operate on different stages of the political process and in doing so have to prove their "issue skills".²³ This requirement is accommodated by the actual "networking"-function:

"The price of buying into one or another issue network is watching, reading, talking about and trying to act on particular policy problems. Powerful interest groups can be found represented in networks but so too can individuals in or out of government who have a reputation for being knowledgeable."²⁴

The "expert-issue-watchers"²⁵ in the PTTs themselves are not only representing a part of the network but also provide the necessary convocational infrastructure for the cooperation of political elites.²⁶ Together these elites work hard on influencing the proximate decision makers (president and congress) and the public. Heclo relates to these people as "policy politicians - experts in using experts, victuallers of knowledge in a world hungry for right decisions."²⁷ PTTs take on an increasingly important role in providing the American political system with seemingly trustworthy, indisputable answers to global questions. They fit the functional needs of "risk societies" and can thus be utilized by various elites as instruments of influence.

²²Heclo 1978, p.102.

²³"that is, well informed about the ins and outs of a particular policy debate." Ibid., p.103.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., p.105.

²⁶These are "staffers, consultants, commission members, interest groups and agencies." Cf. Lindquist 1989, pp.26-29 and the country study of Roger Porter in: Plowden (Hg.) 1987, p.87.

²⁷Heclo 1978, p.103.

THE MYTH OF "THINK TANKS" REVEALED

Speaking of "Think Tanks" we commonly imagine the independent "thinker" who develops thoughts and ideas in the privacy of his scientific ivory tower and makes them available in self-sacrificing manner. Rather, PTTs have always had a keen interest in marketing ideas and trying to directly influence the policy process.

Until the early 1980s the world of the traditional "Public Policy Research Institutes" seemed to be in order. RAND, Brookings, and the AEI (as organizations of the "mainstream") dominated the market and were seen as uncontroversial, fulfilling a narrow technical function of information provision. Research on the role and contributions of PTTs in the public policy process was limited.²⁸ One could find distinctive partisan aspects in the work of the institutions but still no clear ideological patterns.²⁹

Since the early 1980s PTTs have been described as "new inventions in government"³⁰ in the sense of "policy advisory institutions" which serve in a way as almost altruistic, non-profit, and non-partisan, university-like institutions in giving unbiased and reliable policy advice. But the normative objective is a marked contrast from the reality. Instead, these policy-institutions engage in the business of politics or have at least - this is especially the case with the "older", traditional organizations like Brookings and American Enterprise Institute - been forced to change their agendas and develop particular market strategies with a considerably stronger ideological stance. The turning point is marked by the emergence of the Heritage Foundation, which challenged the established players and eventually changed the market. Heritage occupied a niche in the market by providing a decidedly conservative viewpoint on major policy issues and created at the same time a "personnel factory" intended to serve the Washington policy community. By the mid 1980s Heritage had acquired a dominant role in the conservative opinion spectrum and thereby become a leading contender in the so-called "war

²⁸If existing at all.

²⁹James A. Smith: Think tanks and the politics of ideas. In: David Colander, A.W. Coats (Hg.): The Spread of Economic Ideas. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press 1989.

³⁰Yehezkel Dror: Think Tanks. A New Invention in Government. In: Carol H. Weiss, Allen H. Barton (Hg.): Making Bureaucracies Work. Beverly Hills, London: Sage 1980, pp.139-152.

of ideas".³¹ The older, more traditional players had to react. As a result the market of ideas changed to a more politicized and ideological place:

"The movement conservatives and their advocacy tanks have settled in around Washington, and they are getting comfortable. Meanwhile, the stolid old think tanks, which once helped to hold together the center in American politics, are trimming their moderate ways to fit the bold fashion of this decade's foundation."³²

The success of Heritage elucidated as well the weakness of the liberals who seemed to be almost "speechless" - not counting the "outspoken" but all too radical Institute for Policy Studies. In a reaction they set up liberal PTTs which were designed after the successful Heritage model. The Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) founded the Progressive Policy Institute; former Secretary of State Edmund S. Muskie inspired the Center for National Policy;³³ and other liberals established the Economic Policy Institute.³⁴

In addition to these activities, more and more "policy-entrepreneurs" and even political candidates felt encouraged to create PTTs which were to serve their more personal interests. Remembering the 1984 presidential campaign slogan "Where's the beef?", candidates for the 1988 election hurried to establish their own PTTs, because candidates seemed to be desperate for ideas, something to give their campaign an air of substance.³⁵

Although these organizations of Gary Hart (Center for a new Democracy), Jack Kemp (Fund for an American Renaissance), and Bruce Babbitt (American Horizons) were not exactly successful they made use of a loophole for campaign financing, because tax-exempt foundations formed under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code can accept unlimited, tax-deductible contributions from individuals, corporations, and labor unions.³⁶ These organizations are indeed prohibited from participating in the campaign but "IRS rules on such

³¹Robert K. Landers: Think Tanks. The New Partisans? In: Editorial Research Reports 1 (June 1986) 23, p.471.

³²Time, 1.9.1986, p.23.

³³Los Angeles Times, 6.11.1988, p.6.

³⁴Washington Post, 30.8.1989. Cf. also Newsweek, 2.4.1990, p.38 and The New Republic, 2.4.1990, p.18.

³⁵Business Week, 12.5.1986, p.61.

³⁶Ibid.

foundations are loose enough so that they can easily provide indirect political benefits to their sponsors."³⁷

There now exist more than 1,000 private non-profit research institutes concerned with public policy questions in the United States.³⁸ And over one hundred of these are located in Washington and around the beltway: The number of people employed in PTTs has more than doubled since 1980, and the number of institutes has more than tripled.³⁹

As a result the PTT-market at the beginning of the 1990s looks much different than a decade ago. Fundamental attributes are the ideological, differentiated, and segregated characteristics of the market:

"As the field expanded, the concept evolved significantly. Scholarly detachment lost ground to partisan marketing of ideas. The distinction between public-policy research institutes and propaganda mills has become blurred."⁴⁰

They have adopted a pattern of behavior in the institutional environment of the USA which contributes to "elite accomodation", the process "whereby governmental policy is worked out through sustained negotiation and consultation among members of the political elite."⁴¹ In contrast to this system-conforming interpretation of the ideological turn of the PTTs some critics stress the assertedly serious and dysfunctional effects. James A. Smith is frightened by the phenomenon of the "ideological" PTT:

"What really scares me is that the center is in trouble. These new tanks are not looking as far ahead as these organizations did in the past. What's really in trouble is the long-term research and planning that gave our politics their pragmatic quality."⁴²

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸James A. Smith 1989, p.178.

³⁹Los Angeles Times, 6.11.1988.

⁴⁰Los Angeles Times, 8.11.1988. This is not a special problem of "Think Tanks". Joel D. Aberbach, R.D. Putnam, B.A. Rockman: Bureaucrats and Politicians in Western Democracies. Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1981 have shown, that Western European top-bureaucrats do not restrict themselves on the professional advice but are actively involved in the interest-led political bargaining process.

⁴¹Robert Presthus: Elites in the Policy Process. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press 1974, p.3, Fn. 1.

⁴²Time, 1.9.1986, p.23.

Robert K. Landers elaborates on this view and stresses the alleged destabilizing consequences of the more articulate "ideological" PTT:

"If the very disinterestedness in public policy research is eliminated, if all think tanks and their scholars are assumed to be combatants (or slackers) in an ideological war, then does not that undermine their very reason for being, and undermine as well what many have regarded as the special strength of America's politics - its non-ideological character, its emphasis on compromise and consensus?"⁴³

Instead of emphasizing these dysfunctional effects one could, however, also explain the changes as functional equivalents for otherwise missing (party-) ideologies and a need for indisputable answers to global questions of highly risk-perceptive industrial societies.

"CONVENTIONAL" WISDOM

Marxists and elite researchers like Domhoff, Dye and Pescheck tend to demonize the role of "Think Tanks" and in doing so reduce them to allegedly conservative, especially "new right" groups. According to this view the "Think Tanks" are merely puppets on the strings of corporations acting in the center of the political decision-making-process. An even more deprived group, the proximate policy makers (president and congress), are entirely dependent on these conspiring planners.⁴⁴ With that, they misinterpret the role of "Think Tanks" as do other authors who regard the "Think Tanks" as alleged agents of a leftist "new class".⁴⁵ Sowell and Pines depict egalitarian "faith warriors" threatening democratic values in general and American ones in particular.

⁴³Landers 1986, p.457.

⁴⁴The latest studies of this school include Dye 1990; Joseph G. Pescheck: Policy-Planning Organizations. Elite Agendas and America's Rightward Turn. Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1987. G. William Domhoff: Who Rules AMERICA Now. A View for the 80's. New York: Simon & Schuster 1983.

⁴⁵S. Steven Sowell: Covert Cadre. Inside the Institute for Policy Studies. Introduction by David Horowitz. Ottawa, Ill.: Green Hill 1987; Burton Yale Pines: Back To Basics. The Traditionalist Movement That Is Sweeping Grass-Roots America. New York: William Morrow and Company 1982; Real Jean Isaac, Erich Isaac: The Coercive Utopians. Social Deception by America's Power Players. Chicago: Regnery Gateway 1983.

Even if there is some truth to these interpretations, they detract from the serious discussion of Political Think Tanks. So too does the massive amount of journalistic literature about the phenomenon.⁴⁶ The commonly used pattern of analysis tries to show that the Reagan-Revolution, in need of appropriate ideas, provoked the founding of right-wing PTTs. The new "war of ideas" saw the increasing dominance of these "rightist" groups, funded by "rightist" foundations and businesses and utilized by "rightist" politicians and administrators.

Another kind of literature focuses on an idealized picture of "old-fashioned Think Tanks" in the policy-process, but tends to ignore the aspect of politics.⁴⁷ PTTs are regarded as much needed institutions of planning and advice which should be increased in numbers and elaborated as regards their duties and responsibilities.

Outside of these literatures one can hardly find thorough research on the political aspect of "Think Tanks". The only substantial studies are the recent article of Kent Weaver and the forthcoming book by James A. Smith.⁴⁸ Although these authors seem to agree with the diagnosis presented here they apparently tend to misinterpret the developments in the market of PTTs as dysfunctional: The increase of ideology and partisanship is held responsible for the loss of

⁴⁶Jerome L. Himmelstein: *To The Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism*. Berkeley u.a.: University of California Press 1990; Sidney Blumenthal: *The Rise of the Counter-Establishment. From Conservative Ideology to Political Power*. New York: Times Books 1986; John S. Soloma III: *Ominous Politics. The New Conservative Labyrinth*. Introduction by Henry Steele Commager. New York: Hill and Wang 1984; Thomas Byrne Edsall: *The New Politics of Inequality*. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company 1984.

⁴⁷Dror (Fn. 30); Y. Dror: *Required Breakthroughs in Think Tanks*. In: *Policy Sciences* 16 (1984), pp.199-225; Giandomenico Majone: *Evidence, Argument and Persuasion in the Policy Process*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press 1989; Lindquist 1989.

⁴⁸Cf. Fn. 29 (Smith) and Fn. 9 (Weaver). Older studies, including the probably best case study (Bruce Smith 1966) are Charles B. Saunders: *The Brookings Institution. A Fifty-Year History*. Washington: Brookings Institution 1966; Bruce L.R. Smith: *The RAND Corporation. Case Study of a Nonprofit Advisory Corporation*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1966; Paul Dickson: *Think Tanks*. New York: Atheneum 1971; Donald T. Critchlow: *The Brookings Institution, 1916-1952. Expertise and the Public Interest in a Democratic Society*. DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press 1985. Forthcoming is James A. Smith: *The Idea Brokers: Think Tanks and the Rise of the New Policy Elite* 1990. The same historian is currently working on an institutional history of the Brookings Institution. Information provided by a letter to the author from R. Kent Weaver (February 16, 1990).

consensus in the policy debate and the shift of the "center" to the "right".

A NEW - FUNCTIONAL - APPROACH

In contrast to these answers offered so far I would like to suggest a functional approach which establishes PTTs as relatively new, party-like institutions of politics. They perform as a substitute for American parties which lack the capacity to provide the right ideas at the right time and offer information and explanations in the risk-sensitive industrial societies of the west.

Suzanne Keller's Theory of Strategic Elites helps explain the shifting role of PTTs.⁴⁹ According to Keller, it is the task of strategic scientific elites to contribute to the integration of society by providing ideas and explanations. Strategic elites are efficient and responsible minorities whose very existence is becoming all the more significant in phases of rapid social change. In the developed industrial societies, characterized by a prevailing trend to risk perceptive societies one can observe a multiplication of strategic elites. Their diversity is in turn responsible for the change of the functional role of elites who take over coordinating and cooperative functions and act, in accordance with this view, "as guardians and creators of collective values, and as managers of collective aims and ambitions."⁵⁰

Starting from this approach the functional role of scientific advisory elites in the risk sensitive industrial societies can be described as one of the supply and diffusion of answers to and explanations for civilizational problems.

The increasingly pluralist composition of these strategic elites relates directly to the pluralist constitution of the American political system. They are part of the political culture, and represent a particular "culture", "the national constellation of politically relevant values and the institutional structures that reflect and reinforce them"⁵¹ on the elite level - which will be called "elite culture".

⁴⁹Suzanne Keller: Beyond the Ruling Class. New York: Random House 1963.

⁵⁰Keller 1963, pp.5-6.

⁵¹Prethus 1974, p.3.

A functional analysis of these strategic elites and their institutional setting has - according to this view - to prove that the pluralist view of the American political systems also holds true for the market of PTTs - even if there seem to be structural advantages for the better financed, conservative groups. Table 1 shows results of an empirical survey of Network Television news broadcasts in 1987 and 1988:

Table 1 ⁵²	
APPEARANCES ON NETWORK TELEVISION NEWS SHOWS BY SPOKESPERSONS FROM POLITICAL THINK TANKS (1987/1988)	
American Enterprise Institute	23
Brookings Institution	17
Carnegie Endowment	11
Council on Foreign Relations	3
Heritage Foundation	3
Arms Control Association	2
Institute for International Economics	2
International Institute for Strategic Studies	2
Center for Strategic Studies	2
Free Congress Research and Education Foundation	2
Cato Institute	1
Conservative Caucus Foundation	1
Joint Center for Political Studies	1
Petroleum Industry Research Foundation	1
Employee Benefits Research Foundation	1
TOTAL	72

⁵²Based on empirical data by Lawrence C. Soley: The News Shapers. Minnesota: University of Minnesota 1989. Soley selected a sample from among the network evening newscasts "airing between January 1, 1987 and December 30, 1988. The selection procedure consisted of randomly selecting 3 two week clusters from 1987 and 1988, for a total six weeks of programming. (...). The selected intervals were: January 15-28, 1988; February 1-14, 1987; May 7-21, 1988; August 1-14, 1987; September 14-28, 1987; and November 8-21, 1988. The six intervals contained 86 days or a maximum 258 newscasts by the three networks." ibid., p.10. 24 newscasts were either not scheduled or were preempted. Within the remaining 234 broadcasts there were 260 appearances of "news shapers", ibid., p.15.

These advantages, though, can be compensated by the extensive presence of "left wing"-intellectuals in the media, public interest groups and universities.⁵³ Rothman and Lichter support this view in respect to the environmental movement:

"Some liberal or radical members of key strategic elites (especially the news and entertainment media and public-interest groups), who are alienated from the social and political system but live in an environment in which they cannot directly criticize the hegemony of liberal capitalism, are drawn to concrete issues that serve as a surrogate for such a critique. (...) They must be issues that can appeal to a larger, nonideological constituency if they are to be successful in arousing public support."⁵⁴

In so far as the political process and "elite transfer" is involved one can compare the role of PTTs in the USA with the one played by parties, political foundations, and administrative bureaucracies in parliamentary democracies. Responsible for the relative strength of the PTTs is the inability of American political parties to formulate ideas and their limited political role as electoral coalitions. Complementing the decline of parties⁵⁵ and their inability to develop ideas and to provide the necessary elite recruitment and transfer, the system increasingly assigned these functions to the PTTs. Their intensified ideological alignment is a consequence of these developments which became clear in the mid-1980s with the success of the Heritage-Foundation. Alexis de Tocqueville already had observed the ability of America to build new institutions rather than modify

⁵³S. Robert Lichter, Stanley Rothman, Linda S. Lichter: The Media Elite. Bethesda: Adler & Adler 1986; Roger Kimball: Tenured Radicals. How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education. New York: Harper & Row, 1990; Seymour M. Lipset: The Academic Mind at the Top: The Views and Behavior of Faculty Elites. In: Public Opinion Quarterly 46 (1982), pp.143-168.

⁵⁴Rothman, Lichter 1987, pp.398-399.

⁵⁵Martin Wattenberg: The Decline of American Political Parties, 1952-1988. Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1990. Austin Ranney: The Political Parties: Reform and Decline. In: Anthony King et al. (ed.): The New American Political System. Washington: AEI 1978, p.247 emphasizes the societal functions of interest-aggregation and consensus-building through parties which are endangered by the decline.

existing ones⁵⁶ - like the parties - which have seemingly proved to fail in the necessary functions of the generation and diffusion of ideas as well as the convocation and the transfer of elites. Thereby he confirms the view that PTTs can be described as "new" political institutions:

"These organizations embody our multifarious and shifting ideas about government in general and about policies in particular. And in a political system where parties have tended to function more as electoral coalitions than as focal points for ideological controversy or coherent policy planning and thinking (...) policy research institutions have played an important role in building and sustaining policy consensus."⁵⁷

A necessary condition of the rise of PTTs would be the increased risk sensitivity which calls for indisputable answers to global questions.⁵⁸ Expert strategic elites are the preferred beneficiaries of this civilizational process.⁵⁹ They seem to provide certain and unambiguous answers. Empirical research has shown that the PTTs are now the most preferred experts of the TV-networks:

⁵⁶Alexis de Tocqueville: Democracy in America. The Henry Reeve Text as revised by Francis Bowen. Edited by Phillips Bradley. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963, Vol. 1, pp.43-44.

⁵⁷Smith 1989, pp.181-182.

⁵⁸Cf. for the general approach Beck, Fn. 4 and for the role of media-elites Rothman, Lichter 1987, pp.383-404.

⁵⁹The same holds true for judicial and theological elites.

Table 2 ⁶⁰	
"NEWS SHAPERS" ON NETWORK TELEVISION NEWS SHOWS 1987/1988 BY CATEGORY	
"Think Tanks"	72
Experts, Analysts, Consultants	57
Former Politicians and Officials	50
Academics	37
Journalists	26
Economists	9
Others	9
TOTAL	260

However, these results do not necessarily imply that these institutions would actually have better or more reliable answers and credibility. But they are proof of the ubiquitous presence and the ascribed prestige of these institutions.⁶¹

A further reason for the increased pluralism of the market of PTTs might be seen in the rivalry between the branches of power. Historians have shown that the foundation of "Think Tanks" can be directly related to situations when competition between the powers was most severe.⁶² The fragmented committee- and subcommittee

⁶⁰Soley 1989, p.47. The number of "quotes" in newspapers is of course even higher. Cf. Smith 1989, p.189: "The Op-Ed page has become something of a battleground for research organizations; it is a handy indicator of the public visibility of an institution's research staff."

⁶¹Cf. the answer to the question "Why the press is addicted to Norman Ornstein" in: Washington Monthly, December 1986, pp.33-40. The "King of Quotes" (article headline) is simply faster, more reliable and more to the quotable point than his colleagues.

⁶²"The inspiration for the Brookings Institution came in the 1910s at a time when the federal executive seemed especially weak in relation to congress. AEI was founded in the 1940s when Congress and conservative supporters outside were trying to redress an imbalance in its powers against a vastly expanded executive bureaucracy. Heritage was set up in the 1970s primarily to assist an ideologically conservative congressional faction in its battles against the Republican Party's then moderate legislative leadership and an Executive Branch that seemed unsympathetic to the conservatism of the hard right." Smith 1989, p.180.

structure of congress and the balkanized bureaucracy have contributed to the strength of the market of the idea producers as well. And the same holds true for the traditional distrust of a permanent bureaucracy in America.⁶³

CONCLUSION

In the face of an increasing demand for expert information in the "risk societies", intermediary expert-institutions have gained influence in all western industrial societies, because they adhere to the myth of valid expert answers. In the American political system PTTs have taken over the function of political expert advice which in the parliamentary democracies is usually given by parties, political foundations and the top-bureaucracy. The former institutions have thereby changed their appearance. In reaction to the increased demand for indisputable answers to global questions, which almost indispensably require ideological answers, they gave up on neutrality, became more ideological and thus have replaced the political parties which act as mere electoral coalitions. In addition they have taken over the latter's functions of elite transfer and convocation. Thus they carry out a functional role in the political system and can act so, as long as the parties do not develop ideological points of reference and the PTTs' credibility as expert-institutions is not damaged - or until the high awareness and perception of "risk" in modern societies disappears.⁶⁴

⁶³"This long-standing distrust of bureaucrats, the deeply ingrained suspicion (or at least an ambivalence) toward experts in a democratic society, the absence of permanent departmental undersecretaries, and the large number of political appointees all help to explain why private repositories of expertise exist outside, but not far, from government. These organizations function in a political environment where the boundaries between public and private sector are less sharply defined than in other nations and where bureaucratic and legislative processes are more open to outside influences." Ibid., pp.180-181.

⁶⁴Cf. the general explanation of changing preferences by Albert O. Hirschman: *Shifting Involvements. Private Interest and Public Action*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1982.

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