The Politics of De-Industrialisation: Industrial Regions, Political Allegiances and Electoral Systems in West Germany and the United Kingdom

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Britain – A Divided Nation

In April 1984, it became evident that the year would not be a good one for the North of England. The miners' strike had taken its grip on the region and the mood was grim. The government in London was determined to push through sweeping reforms and to modernise, rationalise and privatise the industrial sector. With its old manufacturing and mining industries, the North of the country was on the receiving end of these changes. Miners found themselves fighting a battle against reforms which threatened their own economic and personal futures. In this context, John Habgood, the Archbishop of York and an acclaimed moral authority, took an extraordinary step and intervened in the bitter conflict between the national Conservative government and the miners' union by demanding that only those pits should be closed that had been properly mined out beforehand[1] – a position that was very much at odds with the plans of the National Coal Board and the British government. The government wanted to drastically reduce the number of pits and shut down sites that had become an economic liability. According to their plans, no less than eleven sites were to be closed – a step that would have profound and immediate negative effects on the Northern mining regions.[2]

The miners' position within the national economy had been a debated topic in British post-war history since the early 1970s. At the time, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) was a powerful institution which had been able to push through massive pay rises while the rest of the country was already suffering from an economic downturn. In the 1980s, however, the importance of the NUM was to be diminished, partly because of the economic change and a declining importance of the mining industry after the late 1970s, and partly because of new legal restraints. The subsequently weakened position of the unions was mirrored by their demands during the miners' strike: The miners were no longer fighting for higher salaries but for the sheer maintenance of their industry, alongside so many other workers in the increasingly embattled and ailing industrial sector.

The prospect of closing mines was not only dire for the old industries and their employees, but reflected a grim situation for the whole North.[3]

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[1] "Archbishop supports effort to save pits," *The Times*, 12 April 1984.

[2] Francis Beckett, David Hencke, *Marching to the Fault Line: The 1984 Miners' Strike and the Death of Industrial Britain* (London: Constable, 2009), esp. 47.

[3] By that, both Northern England and Scotland are meant. Although this article mainly focuses on Northern England, the phenomenon discussed largely applies to both regions.

Most of the traditional heavy industries were situated in this part of Britain. Here, they formed an institutional and economic framework not only for employment, but also for cultural and social activities.[4] When Habgood intervened in the increasingly bitter conflict between the miners and the Tory government in April 1984, he was concerned about much more than the fate of the miners. The archbishop was afraid that both the miners' conflict and the government policy of de-industrialisation threatened the very unity of the country. Ever since John Habgood had become Bishop of Durham in the late 1970s and then Archbishop of York in 1983, he was vividly and acutely aware of the importance that the mining industry had for the region. Thus, he was apprehensive of what might happen if this central pillar of the cultural and economic infrastructure was destroyed.[5]

David Jenkins, a colleague of John Habgood's, was an even stronger supporter of the miners' cause. Jenkins became Bishop of Durham in early 1984. At this time, the conflict between the British government and the miners had almost reached its climax. Jenkins immediately made it clear that he disapproved of the economic policy of the Thatcher government. At his inauguration service, he made crucial and rather unfavourable points about the liberal economic policy of the Conservative Party. According to Jenkins, Margaret Thatcher's strategy to rebuild the British economy would lead to a widening gulf between two nations – the poor industrial regions in the North and the prosperous regions in the South. He saw his own task as a regional bishop to represent the basic interests of the people in his diocese and thus to oppose the economic policy of the government. If the miners and their community had no voice within the political system in London, then Jenkins was prepared to give them a powerful one.

In this way, Jenkins' political commitment was a direct consequence of the make-up and the structure of British politics in the 1980s. The interests of the miners – and of the North of Britain as a whole – could be widely ignored by the political establishment because they hardly mattered to the decision making in London. As long as the government managed to isolate the political positions of the Northern community, London policy makers could decide above their heads. One interpretation of the miners' strike looks at the political extremism of the NUM to explain the isolation of the Northern mining communities with a growing impatience with the NUM that extended to some of the miners as well. On the other hand, the miners' strike and its eventual outcome are often seen as a case study for the growing gulf between North and South and the increasingly dominant position the South gained over the Northern parts of the country – both in terms of economic standing and with respect to political influence. This essay does not aspire to offer an alternative explanation for these established readings of the 1984 events, but wants to place the debate on the miners' strike in particular, and on the growing gulf between 'the North' and 'the South', into a structural context. To do so, it compares the developments and political structures in Britain and Germany, where the history, development and decline of the mining industry followed a rather different path. The central element in this analysis is the comparison of the contrasting effects that different voting systems can have on the political options and decision-making processes. While it cannot completely explain what happened in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s it does provide a description of a framework which made certain events and political tactics possible that would hardly be conceivable in West Germany.

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[4] Dominic Sandbrook, *State of Emergency: The Way We Were: Britain, 1970-1974* (London: Penguin, 2011), 360-363; Richard Vinen, *Thatcher's Britain: The Politics and Social Upheaval of the 1980s*, (London: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 284.

[5] Peter Itzen, *Streitbare Kirche: Die Church of England vor den Herausforderungen des Wandels* (Baden Baden: Nomos, 2012), 325-326.

Economic Challenges of the 1970s and 1980s

The rift between England's North and South had many faces. The most significant difference between the two parts of the country was the socio-economic situation. The North was highly industrialised and consequently suffered most from the steady de-industrialisation that had occurred since the 1970s. In this environment, the cultural, political and economic infrastructure created problems of its own that were not directly caused by the Thatcherite policy of the 1980s.[6] Even though the process of de-industrialisation was triggered by economic changes that were experienced by many Western countries alike, regardless of their social, structural and economic policies,[7] its consequences were felt most strongly in the old industrial regions. Signs of an emerging global economy began to be visible, and international competition rose sharply. Subsidies and other forms of financial support that were designed to prop up an old and ailing industry increasingly failed to have a noticeable impact on the performance of the industrial sector. The costs of production in Western Europe were rising sharply against those of new economic rivals, most particularly in contrast to the low costs in East Asia. Since the 1950s, coal mining had become rather unproductive following the boom of the oil industry. It continued to have some importance for the supply of energy, but became less and less profitable. By the early 1980s, it had become an economic liability in many West European countries.

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[6] Ron Martin, "The Political Economy of Britain's North-South Divide," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series 13 (1988), 389-418.

[7] Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Lutz Raphael, *Nach dem Boom: Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte seit 1970* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 52-60.

Coal mining was not the only traditional industry that suffered from changes in the set-up of the global economy.[8] New forms of production were needed to keep the European industries competitive. These raised the productivity of the European industry but had an adverse effect on the labour market. Rationalisation and computerisation found their way into industrial plants, thus making a significant number of jobs redundant. However, even these processes could only partly offset the problems of the comparatively high wage level that put European businesses at a relative disadvantage to their international competitors. When the oil price reached unprecedented heights in the mid-1970s, the costs for energy supply started to rise significantly and further damaged the prospect of the European industrial sector.[9] Slowly but steadily, the West European economy lost their old industrial appearance which had dominated European societies and landscapes in the modern age and had formed a key part in rebuilding the continent after the end of World War II.[10]

From the 1970s, it was evident that grave challenges lay ahead for all West European societies. Yet the political answers to these challenges differed widely from country to country – and they had a profound, but often very different impact on the traditional industrial regions. West Germany and the United Kingdom are telling examples of how different the reactions to these challenges could be in the 1980s, in spite of apparent commonalities. Both governments shared a similar political background – they were both right of centre, favoured liberal economic reforms, and held some common values. In Britain, the Thatcher government presented itself as fighting for the public good and was consequently willing to accept hardship in the industrial sector because of a necessary modernisation, arguing that this would eventually lead to nationwide prosperity. With hindsight, some political measures may seem less extreme now than was often thought.[11] Yet the public perception was that Britain was governed by radicals, willing to push through their political beliefs regardless of the immediate consequences for the workers and their industries. Britain was not the only country to experience a significant shift in the economic and political debate during the 1980s. In many European countries, the economic doctrine of monetarism became influential as the old Keynesian strategies increasingly failed to boost the economy. Yet Britain differed substantially from countries like Germany or the Netherlands because the government used a different political rhetoric to accompany and ease these changes. It was a radical approach with which the economic shift was legitimised. No European country, save Britain, declared strict monetarism to be the sole road to salvation and economic recovery. Indeed, the winding down of the old industries was even publicly embraced, so that Britain would not become an economic "museum", as Margaret Thatcher announced.[12]

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Hartmut Kaelble, *Kalter Krieg und Wohlfahrtsstaat: Europa 1945-1989* (München: Beck, 2011), 177-181; Jens Hohensee, *Der erste Ölpreisschock 1973/74: Die gesellschaftlichen und politischen Auswirkungen der arabischen Erdölpolitik auf die Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Westeuropa* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1996).

[10] Doering-Manteuffel, Raphael, *Nach dem Boom*, 52-60. For more detailed accounts see Anthony Sutcliffe, *An Economic and Social History of Western Europe since 1945* (London: Longman, 1996); Werner Abelshauser, *Der Ruhrkohlebergbau seit 1945: Wiederaufbau, Krise, Anpassung* (München: Beck, 1984); Rainer Schulze (ed.), *Industrieregionen im Umbruch* (Essen: Klartext-Verl., 1993); Bo Strath, *The Politics of De-Industrialization: The Contraction of the West European Ship Building Industry* (London: Mackays, 1987).

[11] Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, *Geschichte Großbritanniens im 20: Jahrhundert* (München: Beck, 2010), 321-322.

This policy was to have a substantial and negative effect on the economic prospects of heavily industrialised regions in Britain. Both the perception of the government and some of the actual political measures led to a fierce political climate, with Margaret Thatcher and her colleague Norman Tebbit forming the core of an apparently hard-hearted administration that appeared disinterested in the future development of whole regions and the anxieties felt by many families who made their living in those affected industries. It was a remarkable development for a party which in the 1970s was known for its inclusive 'One Nation' policy.

In West Germany, an equally broad conservative government chose to follow a very different strategy and pursued instead a rather moderate approach. The Ruhr basin was of similar importance for the national coal industry as Yorkshire and the British North, but it suffered a very different fate. Rather than pushing through policy that tried to transform society into a service sector, the government decided that industrial production should remain an important part of the economic strategy of Germany. Although the German government also tried to enable a moderate and careful transition into a slightly more service oriented economy, this strategy helped to ease the pains of transitional de-industrialisation in West Germany.[13]

The Decline of the Class Vote

These different economic strategies followed different political strategies, but they were also dependent upon the political system and especially on the way in which the will of the people was represented in parliament, i.e. on the voting system and party allegiances, which were and are important parameters for the political process. These parameters in turn had determined certain fairly stable patterns historically. Traditionally, people decided to support a party not only on an issue basis, but also along preferences that were determined by class divisions, regional influences and other stable factors of identification.[14] This concept influenced political perceptions, and parties needed to take these preferences into account in order to secure electoral support. In Britain, these tendencies were particularly strong because the first-past-the-post system strengthened regional and social differences alike in voting.[15] Under this system, votes of the politically smaller part of the electorate of a constituency are not represented in the House of Commons. As a result, industrial regions tended to choose Labour representatives whereas economically advanced regions, especially in the South, had a tendency to vote for Conservative or Liberal MPs. [16] In the early decades of post-war Britain, working class people would vote abundantly in favour of Labour or, to a much lesser extent, for the Liberals, but only to a very small extent for the Conservative Party, which was widely seen as a party for the establishment and the middle classes.[17] This trend continued to be one of the basic and most important patterns in British politics well until the 1960s.

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[12] "Thatcher warning of 'museum society'," *The Times*, 27 September 1984; for the increasingly radical rhetoric of the Thatcher government see Eric J. Evans, *Thatcher and Thatcherism* (London: Routledge, 2005), 41-52.

[13] Harm G. Schröter, "Von der Teilung bis zur Wiedervereinigung (1945-2004)," in: Michael North (ed.), *Deutsche Wirtschaftsgeschichte: Ein Jahrtausend im Überblick* (München: Beck, 2005), 356-426, esp. 396; Kai-William Boldt and Martina Gelhar, *Das Ruhrgebiet: Landschaft, Industrie, Kultur* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftl. Buchges., 2008), 53-63.

From the 1970s onwards, however, voting habits became more volatile. Political scientists nowadays even argue that the 1970s saw a general decline of the old class cleavage.[18] Some claim that the 1970s and 1980s saw the 'end of class voting' and that people increasingly voted by considering issues. Richard Rose and Ian McAllister, for example, argue that since the 1970s, the occupations of voters have become less important for their voting decisions.[19] Ronald J. Johnston, C. J. Pattie and J. G. Allsopp equally point out that the old picture of a class divide does not reflect the complex reality of voting patterns in the late 20th century.[20] This corresponds with the fact that the connections between certain parts of the electorate and political parties were indeed considerably weakened.[21]

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[14] Richard Rose and Ian McAllister, *Voters Begin to Choose: From Closed Class to Open Elections in Britain* (London: Sage, 1986), 1, 8-12; David Butler and Donald Stokes, *Political Change in Britain* (London: St.Martins Press, 1969), 45; Anthony Heath, Roger Jowell and John Curtice, *How Britain Votes* (Oxford et. al: Pergamon Press, 1985), 13-27; Mark N. Franklin, *The Decline of Class Voting in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 8-28.

[15] David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1983* (London/Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1984), 362-363.

[16] Ronald J. Johnston, Charles J. Pattie and J. Graham Allsopp, *A Nation Dividing: The Electoral Map of Great Britain 1979-1987* (London: Longman, 1988), 108-114, argue that regional effects and differences had an important impact on the voting patterns, creating regions that were predominantly Labour or Conservative.

[17] Above and: Peter J. Madgwick, *Introduction to British Politics,* 3rd Edition (London: Hutchinson Publishing, 1984), 413-417.

[18] André Kaiser, "Parteien und Wahlen," in: Hans Kastendiek and Roland Stum (eds.), *Länderbericht Großbritannien: Geschichte, Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft, Kultur* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2006), 181- 204, esp. 190-191.

[19] Rose and McAllister, *Voters begin to choose.*

[20] Johnston, Pattie and Allsopp, *A Nation Dividing,* 65-66.

For the Conservative Party, this development led to an increasing voting share of manual workers. Since the 1970s, the manually skilled worker's vote for the Tory Party rose by nearly 50 per cent – a development that was reinforced by a strategic change of the Tory Party that began to target educated voters and workers under the age of 25.[22] This scale remained steady even during the early 1980s when Margaret Thatcher was in power and enacting policy that purportedly went against the interests of the skilled workers.

	Oct 1974	1979	1983	1987
Con	21	32	30	31
Lab	64	55	49	48
Lib/All	15	13	21	21

Table 1: Skilled working class voting share.[23]

Apart from the general trend of weakened class allegiances, the considerable changes in voting patterns were also connected with structural changes in the political landscape. The re-emergence of the Liberal party as a viable and important political force unquestionably loosened class links within the electorate and triggered a redistribution of votes in many constituencies. Yet this was also an indication of the success of the new strategy of the Conservative Party which, under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher, managed to reach out to voters beyond the middle classes. At the same time, the Labour Party faced increasing problems to secure a solid majority within the working class, and they also failed to attract new voters among the middle classes.[24]

Partly, the weakening ties between party preferences and class position can be explained by the precarious political position of the Labour Party in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Labour Party struggled with a public image of a backward looking and unreliable political group that consisted largely of extremist politicians without a sound concept for the future of the country. By contrast, the image of the Conservative Party was far more positive. In the early 1980s, the Tory Party was widely seen as the only party that was reliable and able to solve Britain's problems. Compared to the Labour Party, the Tories were even seen as a fairly moderate political force.[25]

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[21] Madgwick, *Introduction to British Politics*, 415.

[22] Robert Waller, "Conservative Electoral Support and Social Class," in: Anthony Seldon, Stuart Ball (eds.), *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), 579-610, esp. 596-597.

[23] Anthony Heath et. al. (eds.), *Understanding Political Change: The British Voter 1964-1987* (Oxford: Pergamon Pr., 1991).

[24] Madgwick, *Introduction*, 417-419.

	Conservative	Labour	Alliance
Keeps its promise	30	15	11
Understands problems facing Britain	49	37	47
Moderate	23	11	51
Extreme	26	42	1
Professional in its approach	51	13	25
Will promise anything to win votes	36	49	16
Divided	7	65	14

Table 2: Attitudes towards political parties in 1983.

The poor political performance of the Labour Party in the early years of the Thatcher government and its public perception further weakened old class allegiances. Yet the long term processes of social change were more important than the party system. Those developments prepared the ground for more volatile decision making by voters. The changing composition of society itself had profound effects on the voting patterns. Many working class members still voted Labour, but only as long as they identified with the concept of the working class. Yet there were fewer people who defined themselves in this way. Indeed, fewer people belonged to the working class, at least in its more traditional understanding. The core of traditional Labour voters began to diminish in the second half of the 20th century, corresponding both to the increasing prosperity of society as a whole and the process of de-industrialisation which since the 1970s had made many working class occupations redundant. In 1951, some 766,000 people were employed in the mining industry. In 1971, this figure had fallen to 340,000. In 1991, only 80,000 people were still working in this sector. A similar, although less pronounced development, took place in the metal manufacturing industry – the workforce in this industry decreased from 571,000 in 1951 to 551,000 in 1971 and 166,000 in 1991. Overall, the amount of people employed in the industrial sector nearly halved from 1951 to 1991. At the same time, more and more people began work in the service sector.[26]

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[25] Madgwick, *Introduction*, 424, data from *Sunday Times*, 5 June (1983).

Not only did the composition of the workforce in Britain change rapidly; the self-perception of workers altered drastically as they began to share in the increasing wealth of British society. This was partly a direct consequence of specific measures by the Conservative government in the 1980s. One of the key elements of this policy was the house buying programme which was introduced in 1980. Tenants of council houses and flats could now buy their homes at cheaper rates. The programme proved extremely popular with the tenants - over one million council houses were sold in the 1980s and the new owners of the houses were often working class people who supported the Conservative Party in return.[27] Moreover, people not only started to buy houses, but also to invest in stockholding. Even people who used to belong to the classic working class now considered themselves as upwardly mobile.[28]

For the purpose of this essay, it is important to note that the effects of these changes were not evenly spread over Britain. The centre of industrial production continued to be in the North of the country, whereas the service sector was concentrated in the prosperous South. In the North of the country, the service sector did not create jobs in the same manner as it did in the South. As a consequence, people who had been working in the industrial sector for many years and had lost their jobs due to the de-industrialisation of the 1970s and 1980s could often not find new occupations in the service sector. The working class as a concept of self-perception and lifestyle may have shown signs of decreasing importance in the South, but in the North of Britain the picture was quite different.[29]

The Growing Regional Rift

These regional differences had profound effects on the political alignment of the various regions in Britain. In the North, old class allegiances generally remained intact whereas in the South these old structures were increasingly weakened. As the social structure of the country changed and the economic challenges of the 1970s and 1980s threatened the wealth of the industrial core regions, the political gulf between the two parts of the country widened – a development which was boosted by the implications of the voting system. This tended to overemphasise and reinforce the political gap between Britain's North and South. Although the Conservative Party managed to make some inroads in territory that used to be predominantly Labour land – e.g. the Conservative Party gained additional votes in some inner cities in the 1987 election – the Tory Party hardly gained seats in the industrial North.[30] This tendency was reinforced by the 'neighbourhood effect': People who live together in a close regional context tend to develop similar social, cultural and political views. Paul Johnston and Charles Pattie have only recently shown how middle class voters in the 1980s tended to be more Labour-minded in the North of the country than in the South. It was only in the 1990s that this gulf became less prominent as the Labour Party increasingly managed to appeal to middle class voters in the South. The Conservative Party, however, was still unable to gain significant support in the North.[31]

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[26] Christopher M. Law, "Employment and industrial structure," in: James Obelkevich and Peter Caterall (eds.), *Unterstanding Post-War British Society* (London: Routledge, 1994), 85-98, esp. 91-94.

[27] Johnston, Pattie and Allsopp, *A Nation Dividing*, 173.

[28] As for the dates, Kaiser, *Parteien und Wahlen*, 192.

[29] Ron Martin, "The Political Economy of Britain's North-South Divide," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series 13 (1988), 389-418, esp. 394-397.

The growing gulf in the 1980s between the North and the South is reflected by the results of the swing of votes during the elections in the 1980s. Far fewer people swung from the Labour Party to the Conservative Party in the North of the country than in the South. In the South of England the Tory Party won an additional share of 2.3 and 2.4 per cent in the elections of 1983 and 1987 whereas in the North it lost similar percentages in votes (minus 2.8 per cent in 1993 and minus 1.8 per cent in 1987). Even though the Conservative Party gained a landslide win in 1983 and in 1987, in the North of the country it actually lost seats.[32] In Scotland, for example, the Conservative Party could not hold eleven seats in the general election of 1987.[33]

During the 1980s, the Conservative Party continued to suffer in the classic Labour strongholds of the industrialised North. Labour managed to increase the voting share in those parts of the country where most of the old industry was situated, i.e. the North and the West. The rising share of the Conservative Party support within the working class was concentrated in regions where the Tories were strong anyway.[34] Especially in the South of England and in Greater London, working class members were much more likely to vote Conservative than in the North. The further a constituency was away from London the less probable it was that it fell into Conservative hands. On the other hand working class voters in the

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[30] Butler and Kavanagh, *General Election 1987*, 284.

[31] Ron Johnston and Charles Pattie, *Putting Voters in their Place: Geography and Elections in Great Britain* (Oxford: Univ. Press, 2006), 82-88. The concept of a cleavage that is primarily regionally caused by the 'neighbourhood effect' has come under attack since the mid-1990s. Ian McAllister and D. T. Studlar, "Region and Voting in Britain 1979-1989: Territorial Polarization or Artefact?" *American Journal of Political Science* 36 (1992), 168-199. For the purpose of this essay it is suffice to say that there was a marked regional gulf in the voting results.

[32] David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1987* (Basingstoke/London: Palgrave/Macmillan, 1988), 330.

[33] Fred W. Craig, *Britain Votes 4: British Parliamentary Results 1983-1987* (Altershot: Gower Pub. Co., 1988), 184, 190.

[34] Butler and Kavanagh, *General Election of 1983*, 330-345; Johnston, Pattie and Allsopp, *A Nation Dividing*, 9-21.

North – especially in urban areas – were much more likely to vote Labour than in the south of England.

A very good example for this constellation is Liverpool. In 1987, Labour gained an impressive victory here. The Conservative Party suffered a major blow and lost more than eleven per cent in votes at the general election.[35] With few exceptions, the vote for the Conservative Party in the 1980s tended to be weaker where the economic outlook was bleak and unemployment was high. The constituencies which were suffering from these problems very often fell into the hands of Labour so that under the first-past-the-post system Labour gained the most seats in the North of the country.[36] Yet this pronounced regional gulf did not confront the Conservative Party with any immediate problems. In spite of the intense dislike for the Tory government in London and strong support for Labour in the North, in the election of 1987, the Conservative Party still gained a comfortable overall majority of 102 seats, of which most were won in the South of the country. The North remained a Labour Party country, but that did not seriously endanger the Conservative dominance in the House of Commons.

In terms of the distribution of votes and seats, the bishops were therefore right to talk of a gulf between two nations. These two electoral nations were still split to some extent along class lines, but even more so along regional lines. Interestingly though, not only the Conservative Party managed to profit from the first-past-the-post system. The Labour Party, too, benefited, only in very different regions. The first-past-the-post system helped Labour to gain more seats than it would have had under a system of proportional representation. In 1983, the Labour Party had a share of the vote of only 27 per cent and was able to take 32 per cent of the seats. In 1987, Labour had a share of the vote of 30 per cent and won 35 per cent of the seats. The interests of the Labour voters in the North were therefore well represented (or arguably perhaps overrepresented) within parliament – even if only within the opposition. Yet, the Conservative Party profited more drastically from the effects of the voting system and could thus extend its position in parliament even further. In 1983, the Conservative Party gained an overall voting share of 42 per cent, but managed to win more than 60 per cent of all British constituencies. Likewise, in 1987, the Conservative Party managed to obtain 57 per cent of the seats in the House of Commons in spite of having won only 42 per cent of the national vote.[37]

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[35] Butler and Kavanagh, *General Election of 1987*, 329.

[36] Johnston, Pattie and Allsopp, *A Nation Dividing*, 173.

[37] These figures have been calculated on the basis of Butler and Kavanagh, *British General Election of 1987*, 283-284, 349-354.

		Conservative	Labour	Liberals/All.	Difference C/L
1983	Vote	42.44%	27.58%	25.38%	14.86%
	Seats	61.08%	32.25%	3.54%	28.73%
1987	Vote	42.30%	30.83%	22.57%	11.47%
	Seats	57.85%	35.23%	3.38%	22.62%

Table 3: Results of the 1983 and 1987 elections in seats and percentage.

As a consequence, the Tory government was in no way reliant on any political support in the North. They could well do without a large number of seats in the North of the country provided they could command considerable support in the South. Theoretically, it would be sufficient for a party to win all the seats in the South and only 20 in the North and the West of England combined in order to form a workable government.[38] The overwhelming bulk of the Conservative MPs in the House of Commons had their constituencies in the prosperous South and had little interest in caring about and for the interests of the people in the North. The old industrial core region was in danger of becoming politically marginalised.

Region	Cons. 1983	Cons. 1987	Lab. 1983	Lab. 1987	All. 1983	All. 1987
Strathclyde	5	2	26	30	1	0
Industrial North East	4	4	22	23	1	0
South Yorkshire	1	1	14	14	0	0
Industrial South Wales	7	4	16	19	0	0
Rural Scotland	11	5	2	5	6	8
West Yorkshire	11	9	10	14	2	0

Table 4: Constituencies results in the 1983 and 1987 elections.

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[38] The allocation of seats and regions follows the analysis by Johnston, Pattie and Allsopp, *A Nation Dividing?*, 19.

Industrial Regions, Political Allegiances and Proportional Representation in the Ruhr Basin

Industrial politics in West Germany in the 1980s differed considerably from that which was conducted in Britain. This was particularly the case concerning mining regions. After the Ruhr Crisis in the late 1950s, there was almost universal consensus that the mining industry should be supported. Although there was a great reduction in the number of pits in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, this change took place gradually and over a long period of time. It was also attenuated by enormous financial subsidies – even in the mid-1990s subsidies to the West German mining industry were still as high as 10 billion Deutschmark per annum.[39] There had been a gradual reduction of pits in Britain as well, but unlike West Germany, the United Kingdom saw several intense industrial conflicts over the future of the mining industry in the 1970s and 1980s.[40] In West Germany, by contrast, it was only in the 1990s that a new structural reform of the mining industry was finally considered. It is perhaps symptomatic that this change had to be brought about by a decision of the Federal Constitutional Court when the 'Kohlepfennig', a tax to subsidise the mining industry, was ruled unconstitutional.[41]

There are several important political and historical reasons that help to explain the different handling of the structural crisis of the mining industry in Germany. Christoph Nonn has shown that the fear of the emergence of a radical political movement informed a number of the discussions about the future of the mining industry in the Ruhr basin.[42] There were militant elements within the British union movement as well, but in Germany the local and regional concern both about the economic prospects and about a possible radicalisation could be voiced much more effectively within the existing political framework. No bishops were needed here to represent the interests of the regional population, neither in the 1980s nor in the preceding decades. One explanation points to the structure and effects of the German voting system which safeguards a broader representation of regional attitudes not only in parliament, but also within the ruling parties and the establishment. This assumption might seem surprising, given the fact that the voting results of the 1970s and 1980s suggest a very similar pattern in both Germany and Britain. On a nationwide scale the large majority of working class members traditionally voted for the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) whereas the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) gained support mostly from the middle class and from Catholic voters. Additionally, the liberal party FDP (Free Democratic Party) played an important role in national politics, and the Greens had just entered the national political stage, receiving support mainly from well-educated urban voters.[43]

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[39] Michael Farrenkopf, Michael Ganzelewski, Stefan Przigoda et. al. (eds.), *Glück auf! Ruhrgebiet: Der Steinkohlenbergbau nach 1945* (Bochum: Dt. Bergbau-Museum, 2009), 363-426. The managed decline of the mining industry and the subsidies led to huge costs already in the 1960s: Stefan Goch, "Der Weg zur Einheitsgesellschaft Ruhrkohle AG," in: Farrenkopf et. al. (eds.), *Glückauf!* 284-302, esp. 299. For the general development of the coal crisis and the measures to stabilise the mining industry see Michael Farrenkopf and Rainer Slotta, "Zur Geschichte des Ruhrbergbaus nach 1945 – ein Überblick," in: Farrenkopf et. al. (eds.), *Glückauf!* 24-36; Christoph Nonn, *Die Ruhrbergbaukrise: Entindustrialisierung und Politik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2001); Zoltán Jákli, *Vom Marshallplan zum Kohlepfennig: Grundrisse der Subventionspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1948 – 1982* (Opladen: Westdt. Verlag, 1990); Boldt and Gelhar, *Ruhrgebiet*, 53-63.

[40] Andy Beckett, *When the Light Went Out: Britain in the Seventies* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), 63-87, 145-147.

[41] The Federal Constitutional Court, a particularly powerful institution in Germany, ruled in 1994 that the subsidies for this industry had been unlawful. The decision: BVerfGE 91, 186 – Kohlepfennig; Farrenkopf et. al. (eds.), *Glückauf!*, 422-423.

[42] Nonn, *Ruhrbergbaukrise*; Edgar Wolfrum, *Die geglückte Demokratie: Geschichte der Bundesrepublik von ihren Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Bonn: Pantheon, 2007), 225-226.

Although these relatively clear voting traditions began to change in the 1980s[44], this did not yet considerably affect the Ruhr basin which continued to be the domain of the SPD throughout almost the whole post-war era – almost in the same way as Labour dominated industrial parts of Britain.[45] The margins by which the SPD managed to win over constituencies in the region were sometimes dramatic: Of the 17 constituencies in the Ruhr basin, all but one fell to the SPD in the 1980s[46] and they were won with high margins that reached 30 per cent – as in the case of the constituency of Joachim Poß, an influential SPD politician,[47] or 38 per cent in the case of Günter Schluckebier[48].

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[43] Jutta Graf, „Die Formierung der Wählerschaft zur Bundestagswahl 1987," in: Hans-Joachim Veen and Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (eds.), *Wählerverhalten im Wandel: Bestimmungsgründe und politisch-kulturelle Trends am Beispiel der Bundestagswahl 1987* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1991), 85-128, esp. 96-105; Karl-Heinz Dittrich, „Sozialstrukturelle Bestimmungsgründe der Wahlentscheidung," in: ibid., 129-162, esp. 136, 155-162.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Hans Menge, *40 Jahre Wahlen Nordrhein-Westfalen: Dokumentation in Schaubildern zu Themen des Wahlgeschehens von 1947 bis 1987* (Düsseldorf: Landesamt für Datenverarbeitung u. Statistik Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1987), 34-37.

[46] The constituency in Remscheid fell to the CDU by a very small margin of only 1.5 (1983) and 0.6 per cent (1987) whereas the constituencies in Essen, Duisburg, Dortmund, Mühlheim and Hagen were all won by the SPD. http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/bundestagswahlen/fruehere_bundestagswahlen/, [10.05.2012].

[47] Data have been taken from: http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/bundestagswahlen/fruehere_bundestagswahlen/, [10.05.2012].

[48] Ibid.

	1980	1983	1987
Result (Poß)	59.9 %	60.2 %	59.4 %
Margin (Poß)	29.8 %	26.4 %	28.7 %
Result (Schluckebier)	65.3 %	62.7 %	63.6 %
Margin (Schluckebier)	38.4 %	30.3 %	35.4 %

Table 5: Election results of Joachim Poß and Jürgen Schluckebier.

Even though these are rather extreme examples, the overall political dominance of the SPD in the Ruhr basin cannot be questioned, and it persists up to the present day. At first glance, therefore, it seems that a federal government led by the CDU would have little interest to support a region and an industry where it hardly gained any votes anyway – and where there seemed to be hardly any prospect of becoming more successful. Under a first-past-the-post system this might have worked in a similar way as it had in Britain. But the legal framework in West Germany pushed for a more consensus-oriented policy. Unlike the British system, the German voting system has a very strong proportional element – with important consequences on the way regions are represented in parliament. In most parts of northern England and in Scotland, votes for the Conservative Party are basically lost – they are irrelevant for the composition of the House of Commons. By contrast, the votes for the CDU in the Ruhr area and North Rhine-Westphalia have a direct influence on the composition of the Bundestag, because the German election system is based on proportional representation. [49] In the 1980s, several of CDU MPs from North Rhine-Westphalia entered parliament via the party list:

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[49] The German election system is principally a proportional election system, modified with elements of a majority voting system for direct representation. The voter has two different votes. With the first vote, the voter chooses a certain candidate who is supposed to represent the constituency. With the second vote the voter chooses a party. This vote decides over the allocation of seats between the parties within the Bundestag. Half of the seats are taken by the representatives of the constituencies, the other half are filled up with party members according to their ranking within internal party lists. That means that if a party wins a voting share of 46 per cent and has therefore a claim to 46 per cent of the seats in the Bundestag, but 44 per cent of these seats are already taken up by representatives of the constituencies belonging to the same party, only the remaining two per cent are filled up by party list members. The exact voting system is regulated by the Bundeswahlgesetz. Gerhard A. Ritter, Merith Niehuss, *Wahlen in Deutschland 1946-1991: Ein Handbuch* (München: Beck, 1991), 89-93.

		CDU	SPD
1980[50]	Constituencies	27	44
	Party List	33	26
	Total	60	70
1983[51]	Constituencies	39	32
	Party List	26	31
	Total	65	63
1987[52]	Constituencies	33	38
	Party List	25	24
	Total	58	62

Table 6: Parliamentarians from CDU and SPD from North Rhine-Westphalia.

The same principle also applies to the Ruhr basin. Here, the Christian Democrats hardly managed to win a seat in a constituency, but in contrast to the British system the votes for the party were not lost. In 1983, the CDU gained roughly 1.2 million votes in the Ruhr area[53] – more than eight per cent of the votes the CDU won in the whole country. In 1987, the CDU won 1.1 million votes in the Ruhr basin – which again translates to around eight per cent of the party's total vote. More importantly, under the Hare-Niemeyer-system[54] (which regulates the overall distribution of seats in the German Bundestag) these votes translated into 15 seats.

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[50] *Sitze der Parteien nach Ländern 1980,* http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/bundestagswahlen/fruehere_bundestagswahlen/Sitzverteilung/btw1980sitz.xls, [10.05.2012].

[51] *Sitze der Parteien nach Ländern 1983,* http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/bundestagswahlen/fruehere_bundestagswahlen/Sitzverteilung/btw1983sitz.xls, [10.05.2012].

[52] *Sitze der Parteien nach Ländern 1987,* http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/bundestagswahlen/fruehere_bundestagswahlen/Sitzverteilung/btw1987sitz.xls, [10.05.2012].

[53] This includes constituencies in Bochum, Bottrop, Dortmund, Duisburg, Essen, Gelsenkirchen, Hamm, Hagen, Herne, Mülheim, Oberhausen, Ennepe-Ruhr, Recklinghausen, Unna and Wesel. The exact figures have been calculated according to data from the *Bundeswahlleiter. Ergebnis der Wahl zum 10. Deutschen Bundestag am 6. März 1983 nach Wahlkreisen,* http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/bundestagswahlen/fruehere_bundestagswahlen/btw1983.html, [10.05.2012] and *Ergebnis der Wahl zum 11. Deutschen Bundestag am 25. Januar 1987 nach Wahlkreisen,* http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/bundestagswahlen/fruehere_bundestagswahlen/btw1987.html, [10.05.2012].

[54] For the exact regulations: http://www.bundestag.de/bundestag/ausschuesse17/azur/azur_1.html#bsp1, [10.05.2012]. The consecutive steps for the distribution of seats which are necessary under the Hare-Niemeyer-system are not relevant for the general argument of this article.

$$\frac{votes * total\ number\ of\ seats}{total\ number\ of\ votes} = seats$$

$$\frac{111\,622 * 518}{38\,225\,294} = 15.1$$

Table 7: Calculation according to the Hare-Niemeyer System.

In 1987, the coalition of Christian Democrats and Liberals won the election with a majority of 45 seats[55], a margin where 15 votes could become crucial in contested divisions. The votes from the Ruhr basin mattered for the Christian Democratic Party. Unlike Northern Britain, the interests of the population in the industrial regions in Germany could not easily be ignored. The electoral system worked as a safeguard for the representation of industrial regions within the ruling parties – Members of Parliament needed to secure the support of their home region in order to be re-elected. The same is true for the Members of Parliament in the Landtag of North Rhine-Westphalia. These politicians certainly would not have accepted an aggressive anti-mining policy.

Despite the political controversies about an alleged destruction of the German post-war welfare state, social security benefits were not seriously reduced, nor was the position of the unions genuinely in danger. The government instead tried to safeguard political and social stability by enhancing the social security budget and since 1987 by increasing public debt.[56] Norbert Blüm, one of the most prominent social politicians of the CDU, was a long time a key political ally of Helmut Kohl. He led the social wing of the CDU from 1977 to 1987 and became party leader of the CDU in North Rhine-Westphalia in 1987.[57] His influence within the party was a reflection of the importance of social policy within the CDU, but also of the importance of North Rhein-Westphalia and the Ruhr basin for electoral success of the CDU, and it was almost natural that a social politician like Norbert Blüm should take the lead of the party organisation in this region. Admittedly, the 1.1 million CDU-voters in the Ruhr basin were not necessarily mineworkers – a lot of them certainly were not, judging from research on political and social allegiances in West Germany.[58] Still, according to research by the Allensbach Institute 35 per cent of the voters of the Christian Democratic Union were members of the working class. 21 per cent were members of a trade union. In other words: the political context for the West German government and its economic policy of the

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[55] This figure includes the MPs from West-Berlin who had reduced voting rights. http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/bundestagswahlen/fruehere_bundestagswahlen/btw 1987.html, [10.05.2012]. Without these parliamentarians the majority would have been reduced to 41. Ritter and Niehuss, *Wahlen in Deutschland*, 102.

[56] Wolfrum, *Geglückte Demokratie*, 356-360.

[57] http://www.kas.de/wf/de/71.8284/, [10.05.2012].

[58] Veen and Noelle-Neumann (eds.), *Wählerverhalten im Wandel*, 145.

1980s was very different from that of Britain. The CDU needed to follow a socially more inclusive path in order to secure electoral success.[59] In any case – even if a lot of votes for the Christian Democratic Union originated with the middle class, these voters were still unlikely to vote against the perceived interests of their own region.[60]

In this article, the political effects of the proportional representation system in Germany and their differing results from the British system serve as an example how political and legal structures influence, strengthen and sometimes even pre-determine political processes and decision-making. In Germany, the electoral system is part of a complex legal system that as a whole works towards a consensus oriented political culture. In this system radical and swift political changes are difficult to implement. This principle also found expression in other elements of the constitutional structure of the country, two of which are briefly mentioned here: Firstly, the parliament in Germany is not able to legislate in all matters without the control or the co-operation of other constitutional institutions, namely the Bundesrat, the representative body of the German states. In the 1980s, it was in firm control of the CDU and the CSU[61]. Still, the votes of the delegates from the federal state governments in the Bundesrat could not be taken for granted. This differs considerably from the situation in Britain where the House of Lords has only limited powers to constrain the government of the day.[62] Secondly, under the federal constitution of the Basic Law (Grundgesetz) many powers do not lie with the Bund (the federation), but with the Bundesländer, (federal states). In many matters of legislation the national government needs to co-operate with the state governments.[63] This strongly applies to North Rhine-Westphalia, which is the largest and arguably most important state in Germany. No national government could take the risk of a lengthy and severe conflict against an important state without enduring great political problems or suffering in the polls. In Britain, the picture was very different. The Conservative Party managed to govern Britain for 18 years without any significant support from large parts of the country (i.e. North England and Scotland). During the 1980s, it faced fierce and sometimes violent opposition in the Northern parts of the United Kingdom. The Christian liberal government of Helmut Kohl may have fared less successfully in the Social Democratic heartlands of the Ruhr basin than in the southwest of the country, but it never experienced fervent resistance as the Tories did in the Northern parts of Britain.

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[59] There is, of course, also an economic explanation for the moderate approach of the West German government: In West Germany the industrial sector was far more competitive and successful than its British counterpart. An entirely new economic approach, accompanied by a radical rhetoric, was never in the cards. Whether industrial workers at highly successful companies like BMW, Siemens, or Volkswagen would have approved of a more confrontational political style is fairly uncertain.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Short for Christian Social Union. This party is the equivalent to the CDU in Bavaria and only exists in this State.

[62] For the constitutional role of the Bundesrat see Konrad Hesse, *Grundzüge des Verfassungsrechts der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,* 20th edition (Heidelberg: Müller, 1999), 259-264.

[63] Ibid., 104-117.

Conclusion

"Communities and a whole way of life are swept away at a time when there are no alternatives elsewhere", noted David Jenkins, the bishop of Durham, in 1984, when talking about the Government's treatment of the mining industry and hinting at the bleak perspective for the mineworkers and the whole region after the end of the strike. It was a radical political statement from a member of the clergy.[64] Taking the constitutional set-up of the United Kingdom into account, however, his ambition to stand up for the community of miners and for the people of Durham was legitimate. There were no regional minister presidents that were able to put pressure on the national government. There were hardly any Conservative MPs who were willing to support the mineworkers or who were willing to speak for a more moderate course of the Conservative government.[65] In this context, the Church felt it had to act as a stopgap to compensate for a structural deficit of the British constitution.

This is not to say that this peculiarity of the British constitutional set-up had only disadvantages. This essay does not intend to make moral judgements about the advantages and drawbacks of various constitutional frameworks. Rather, its intention is to show how they facilitated or impeded political actions, programmes and strategies. The British constitution presented the Conservative government with the opportunity to push through sweeping changes that were unthinkable under the German constitutional and electoral constellation. As a consequence, adapting to the problems and phenomena of de-industrialisation took much longer in Germany and produced very different results. German governments had to take account of the political and social priorities of the industrial regions. Compared with the Thatcherite Conservatives of the 1980s, the Christian Democratic Union was a party with rather moderate economic reform proposals. Yet, even if the Kohl government had wanted to pursue a more radical approach, this policy would have had to overcome enormous political resistance. German federalism and the proportional voting system made it extremely difficult to push through rapid changes. Both worked as safeguards against radical alterations and ensured an inclusive, consensual approach towards social and economic challenges.

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[64] "Bishop accuses Government of refusing to care for the poor," *The Times*, 2 October (1984).

[65] Interestingly, one of the few exceptions was the Secretary of State for Energy, Peter Walker, who e.g. met with representatives of the Church of England to discuss the miners' strike: Itzen, *Streitbare Kirche*, 348.

Admittedly, the electoral system and the constitutional order were not the sole reasons for the uncompromising policies of the Thatcher government. After all, under Edward Heath the rules of the constitution were essentially the same as they were under Margaret Thatcher's administration. Unlike the German Basic Law, however, the British constitution provided a technical framework which allowed for radical reforms – even if that put enormous strain on the old industrial regions and the people living there. Previously, such radical, swift and uncompromising reforms had been virtually unthinkable – not because of the British constitution, but because of the mind-set of British politics. This had altered considerably with the arrival of the Thatcher government and Thatcher's outspoken disgust for 'wet politics', i.e. for moderate and inclusive reforms. The CDU in Germany was, by such measures, a party of 'wet politics' – not least because the constitutional and electoral make-up of the country left very little scope for 'dry politics'.

The uncompromising rhetoric of the Thatcher government and her liberal market reforms changed the face of the United Kingdom. For the Conservative Party, the era of Margaret Thatcher proved to be a mixed blessing. It has yet to recover from the after-effects of the Thatcher era. In the North of the country, this party still has enormous problems gaining acceptance beyond the absolute core of its supporters. This has made it difficult for the Conservatives to win elections for many years as the support for this party continued to stay at a comparatively low level. Even in the 2010 elections, when the Labour Party was internally divided and in deep trouble, the Conservative Party did not manage to win an overall majority. It seems as if the political gamble of the Thatcher era – ignoring the sorrows and concerns of wide parts of the population in the North in order to push through drastic political and economic changes – has come at a high price.

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