

PHD RESEARCH

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The ‘Representatives of the Nation’ in the service of their party. The relationship between Belgian political parties and their MPs (1918-1970)

- [Original Title : *De ‘vertegenwoordigers van de Natie’ in partijdienst. De verhouding tussen de Belgische politieke partijen en hun parlamentsleden (1918-1970)*]

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played at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. The Catholic and Liberal ‘cadre parties’ had much more difficulties in turning their members of parliament into subordinate party *agents* when compared with the ‘mass’ Socialist party.

This thesis explores the relation between Belgian political parties and their members of parliament from 1918 until 1970. Political scientists, the press and even politicians label the Belgian political system a ‘Partitocracy’, in which the parties yield too much power. In the 20th century-era of ‘mass parties’ the parliamentary party group was supposed to be an *agent* of the party on the ground. Hence, this thesis explores the relationship between the parliamentary party group and the party organisation as the relation between *agent* and *principal*. The thesis looks at the mechanisms the principal has at his disposal to overcome the agency’s problem: the possible opportunistic behaviour of the agent. The analysis reveals Belgian political parties used several mechanisms in order to gain control over the behaviour of their MPs in the period. Their success in doing so has led to a marked increase in the levels of parliamentary voting cohesion. Full party discipline however was never achieved in matters putting both language groups against each other : Flemish and French-speaking Belgians. Our research highlights the different paths the Belgian parties have followed since the First World War. These different historical trajectories are significantly affected by the differences in party organisation the dis-