

The Local Party Organization and Its Members: Between Randomness and Rationality*

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In this article we shall argue the importance of approaching the relationship between party organizations and party members by analyzing the interaction between characteristics of the national party system, the party organization as a more or less open or closed system, and the resources of individuals particularly conducive to party membership. We shall mainly discuss the organizational level, taking as a starting point different models from organizational theory: the rational behaviour model, the survival model, the bureaucratic model, and the symbolic action model. We apply these models in our search for how political parties seek to mobilize members. Examples illustrating the relevance of the different models are a warning to those who wish to develop a general theory of party organization.

Introduction

“... the fundamental problem is to find meaningful ways of relating variations of this “micro” level of individual reactions and choices to differences in the “macro” properties of the structure within which they occur: to differences in the range and character of the alternatives for the citizen by the institutional arrangements and by the constellation of competing forces in his society. In a rigorous analysis design, such macro-properties would have to be varied systematically and related to differences in patterns of citizen reaction and preferences. Such rigour is hardly practisable in the comparison of units differing in such complex ways along a variety of dimensions, but step-by-step approximations should be within the range of the possible” (Rokkan 1970, 363).

The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the relationship between party organization at the local level and party members. We wish to have a double focus for our study:

- 1) how do party organizations perceive the problem of member recruitment?
- 2) what are the factors influencing individuals to become members?

We further wish to examine:

- a) how does the local party organization perceive its role in the party organiza-

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tion, and how does it work to influence the stream of persons in and out of the organizations and upwards in the organizational hierarchy? Topics in this category will be further elaborated upon in section 3.

b) what kind of people are recruited to party organizations as members and for what reasons? What does it mean to become a party member? We will elaborate on this point in the section "Organizational Boundaries and Membership" below.

Our interest in this topic has been aroused by our previous work on party organizations at an aggregate level, and by studies on the relationship between electoral support and membership recruitment (Selle & Svåsand 1982; Kristiansen & Svåsand 1982; Selle 1983).

Observations at the aggregate levels of these relationships reveal tendencies that are ambiguous and not easy to interpret, and aggregate data, even at the lowest level, conceal some of the most interesting information: membership turnover. The Labour party estimates that the party must recruit 10,000 new members annually just to replace those leaving. Part of the reasons for this ambiguity is the unequal role the organization and membership mobilization have in different parties — or in the same party at different points in time. For instance, the very low member/voter ratio for the Left Socialist party in Norway reveals that party's unwillingness — and/or incapacity — to develop strong links between its supporters and the party. This is clearly in contrast to the Labour party — from which parts of the Left Socialists broke off in 1961 and 1973 — where organization has always been regarded as a central instrument, both in shaping party policy, but most of all as a means of securing a large electoral following. Similarly, in the Conservative party, the electoral success of the 1970s has been accomplished by — if not caused by — a virtual organizational revolution (Kristiansen & Svåsand 1982), whereas earlier the party did not take its organizational apparatus very seriously.

These examples indicate to us that parties have very different conceptions of how important the organizational apparatus is and what it should do. One way to approach this problem, we believe, is to single out a number of local party branches for closer analysis with particular respect to membership recruitment. We believe it is necessary to approach this issue from two angles, that of the *organization*, and that of the individuals being recruited to the organizations. While we are interested in the study of *individual* mobility in and out of the party organization, we believe this must take into account factors on three different levels:

Macro-level: characteristics of the national party systems.

Meso-level: the party organizations as a more or less open or closed system.

Micro-level: the resources of individuals particularly conducive to party membership.

Our main interest is to discuss how the flow of people in and out of the organization is shaped by interaction at all three levels, by the interlocking of contextual, organizational and individual factors. Naturally, in an empirical work it will be impossible to take proper account of all factors. In addition these interrelationships are very difficult to measure because of the impossibility of holding important variables constant. Nevertheless, the interpretation of findings from an even more limited empirical project would be more challenging if seen in a comprehensive theoretical framework.

Whereas studies of membership in parties have been very much concerned with who *becomes* members, few have taken an interest in who *leaves*. We will therefore devote part of the paper to discuss the potential for exits from the party organization. Just as entry into the party is not only the result of individual motivation and resources, exits will also depend upon meso- and macro level factors. Studying exit empirically is of course problematic as there is no easily available source of "*previous*" party members.

Before turning to a discussion of alternative organizational models and the problem of membership recruitment we will comment upon some of the macro-level characteristics.

Macro-Level Characteristics

In an empirical study it is problematic to take proper account of the macro-variations unless the project is a) cross-national, or b) covers several points in time. Therefore, the interpretations of membership mobilization and activity at one point in time may miss out important explanatory factors. There are four factors in particular we believe will influence membership mobilization.

- conflict vs. consensus in national politics,
- the organizational network of parties,
- the increasing possibility of political participation and political influence through the corporative channel, and in voluntary associations in general,
- the rise of alternative communication channels.

Conflict and Consensus

Variations in the overall level of membership recruitment and in particular member activity will coincide with the intensity of political conflict in society. The Norwegian political climate in the post-war period has been characterized as consensus dominated (Torgersen 1970). There was broad agreement between parties on which goals were important to reach, but more disagreement on the means to be used. This certainly seems to have been a valid description with the exception of some foreign policy issues, like EEC-

membership and security policy. A later development is the rise of the Conservative party as a governmental alternative to Labour. This has been associated with a general decline in political distance between these two parties, at least as this is perceived by the voters (Valen 1981).

Increasing consensus and decreasing political distance between the major political alternatives may have lessened the importance of some of the functions of party organizations.

It may not have affected recruitment as much as level of and forms of *activity*. If there is less to “fight” about there is less point in taking part in party work and less to defend. At the local level, Berglund (1980) found that the fiercer the *electoral* competition in the commune, the higher the level of activity.

Perceptions of political conflicts and distance may work in the same way. This is (also) what Valen & Katz (1964, 64) found. The level and types of activities “differ from one party to the other, and within the same party they vary with the political situation”. The Labour party had the most active membership organization both with regard of membership meetings and average participation in the meetings. Even more important is the conclusion that in the period since World War II, which has been characterized by “depolitization”, the entertainment/social sector in local party work has become increasingly important, whereas the amount of time devoted to different types of political activities has been decreasing (op.cit. 64). A recent report on the organization of the Labour party in Norway shows very low activity on the local level, with no long-term planning or political-ideological discussions. In this perspective the local organization no longer seems to function, even as a social organization.

Therefore, changes in the overall level of party membership may not necessarily indicate increasing politicization of the electorate, or increasing political participation, but reflect an extension of participation possibilities. In the same way this may influence also the level of political *mobility*. There is little knowledge of why people leave parties, and what this means. Do they become passive, or do they leave to join other parties? The greater the availability of alternative organizations to become members of, the easier it may be to exit.

Organizational Network

The opportunity for individuals to become party members will depend on the availability of party organizations. Thus, the total membership figure for parties will closely be linked to the extensiveness of its organizational apparatus. The “access structure” of parties is very unequal in such a large territory like the Norwegian. Only two parties, Labour and Conservatives, cover the whole country with party branches. For the smaller parties, both

socialist and non-socialist, the organizational network is more restricted. At the provincial level, all parties have a party organization. However, within each province there are likely to be many communes without branches for one or the other of the smaller parties. Hence, the opportunity for potential party members to become active simply does not exist.

Similarly, just as individual opportunity for membership increases with extension of the party apparatus, so does the mobilization capacity of the party itself also increase. Therefore, an increase in, let us say, Conservative party membership over time does not necessarily mean that there have become more conservative people, but more opportunities for these people to become members.

Alternative Channels of Political Influence

Rokkan called *verzuiling* "the degree of interlocking between cleavage-specific organizations active in the corporative channel and party organizations mobilizing for electoral action" (Rokkan 1977, 565). All parties, in particular the "catch-all" parties, are coalitions related more or less strongly to interest organizations and voluntary associations. These interrelationships are crucial in understanding the dynamics of entry and exit, disintegration and merging of political parties (Rokkan 1970, 353).

In understanding the relevance of political participation through parties, it is necessary to analyse the increasing importance of alternative channels of political decision making. Interest representation in the corporative channel is especially important, but also the direct extra parliamentary action and the relationship of these groups to permanent and ad-hoc voluntary associations.

Knowledge about these interrelationships is very superficial. Research shows, however, some interesting results. The Labour Party, the Conservative party and the Agrarian party have the strongest representation in the corporate channel, meaning that people from the Christian People's party, the Socialist People's party and the Liberal party are most active in direct extra parliamentary action (Olsen & Sætren 1980, 234-236). In his analysis of local politics, Lafferty (1981) found surprisingly low correlations between membership-electoral activity/interest group activity (.32), interest group activity/direct action (.15), and membership-electoral activity/direct action (.20). He concluded by saying we are dealing "with three relatively separate channels of potential political influence" (Lafferty 1981, 40). However, in our opinion, a lot of research has to be done before one can draw any safe conclusion.

Communication Channels and Activity

Organizational structures serve as communication channels downwards and upwards. The political party organization used to be an important means

to distribute information from leaders to followers. However, both the rise in the general education level, and the development of the mass media, in particular radio and television, probably undermine these communication channels. Leaders spread their points of view via radio and television, and the rank and file's views on policies are registered via opinion polls. In the Labour party most of the discussion taking place in the basic party units tends to be concentrated on local issues. On the whole, political life in these units tends to be overwhelmingly dominated by parochial affairs. Few local branches have visitors from outside: "The effect is that our members are often not better informed on political issues than the population in general". Add to this the rise of living standards and the increase in leisure time activity, and there will be fewer incentives for taking an active part in party work. It is difficult, to say the least, to assess the impact of these factors on party organization, but we think that the *raison d'être* of parties has, to some extent, been taken over by other structures in modern society.

Meso-Level Factors: the Organization as Determinant of Membership Mobilization

To what extent is the flow of members into the organization the result of organizational characteristics, and not dependent on the choices of individuals? In the micro-oriented literature great importance is attached to the individual as a *rational actor*. However, individual choices are shaped also by other actors, in this case the parties. How do parties act with regard to membership recruitment?

Organizational Perspectives on Membership Recruitment

In this part of the paper we will present some models explaining organizational behaviour, and apply these to the way political parties themselves seek to mobilize members. The models presented here are taken from organization theory. In organization theory, models explaining the structures and functioning of organizations seldom use political parties as examples. On the other hand, organization theory is also a very general scientific discipline. It should therefore be just as valid to apply the theoretical tools of organization theory to party organizations as to hospitals, unions, firms, and public bureaucracies. We also see it as important to bridge the traditional gap between organization theory on the one hand and the part of political science concerned with the study of elections and political parties.

We will discuss here how four different models of organizational behaviour may be applied to member recruitment activity in organizations. The four models we have in mind may be termed:

- rational behaviour model;
- the survival model;
- the bureaucratic model;
- the symbolic action model.

How do these models fit the case of political parties and particularly the problem of membership mobilization? To what extent do these models differentiate between types of political parties, or distinguish between different phases in the life of political parties?

a) *Political parties and rational behaviour.* In this model the activity performed by the organization is geared towards the fulfillment of organizational goals. It is assumed that the organization has a relatively clear idea of the relationship between means and goals. Consequently the organization will select the type of activity that is likely to be conducive for goal attainment. Not any type of means will be selected. The choice of means will be considered in an efficiency/effectiveness perspective. The organization will attempt to maximize the trade-off between costs of means and the likelihood of rewards (Thompson 1971). A central problem in this model is the avoidance of *uncertainty*. To protect itself the organization tries to surround itself with buffers to reduce the impact of an uncertain environment. Key elements of this model are goal priority, knowledge of means-goal relationship, calculation of means efficiency, and protection of core technology.

Few political parties - and few organizations — can be seen as rational actors. Indeed the concept of rationality may be extremely unsuitable for political parties. The reason for this is the impact of political *ideology* and political tradition. Organizational action is not simply a means-end relationship but is part of the “belief system” of its leaders and members. What is “rational” in reaching certain goals may be inconsistent with the ideological foundation for a party. The historical dimension is crucial. The former political tradition of the party is always of importance in the internal decision-making process (Tanahill 1978). It is this tradition that in many ways is the basis of the political identity and of great relevance for the depth of the political identification. Significant political or organizational change can have consequences for party loyalty. A reorientation or reorganization that looks rational from the leaders’ point of view may be very difficult to implement because it will affect the internal power structure, the relationship between different coalitions, and change the reward and motivation system of the party. For instance, one cannot understand the policies of the Norwegian Communist party as rational behaviour in order to attract more voters. The whole point is rather the reverse — to convince voters to adapt to the party’s views, not the other way around. Thus, the stronger the impact

of *ideological* guidance the less likely the party will be to act according to a rational model in order to increase support. Membership recruitment falls within this category. Parties differ with regard to the usefulness of membership mobilization. Minor parties, like the communist parties in Scandinavia, are more concerned with *whom* they get as members, than with *how many* members they get. It seems to be generally accepted that parties of the left look historically upon organization in a different way from parties on the right. Not only is this the case with revolutionary parties where organization is an absolute must, but also in social-democratic parties. An important difference between the organization of socialist parties and bourgeois parties is the close link between the party organization proper and other types of associations, such as unions and cooperatives. By building extensive organizational networks these parties in effect "shielded" their members from the environment. At the same time, by linking party, union, cooperatives and various leisure type organizations, it could count on a steady reservoir of people to be mobilized. In this way, *organizational* networks became an important means by which to strengthen the party. We may therefore say that Thompson's idea of organizational "buffers" suits the socialist parties very well. It is amazing how long time it took before organizational development became important in non-socialist parties. However, today the traditional difference is declining. Parties like the Conservatives, Christians and Agrarians are also spokesmen of well-organized sectors.

At the same time the typical well-organized practical sub-culture of the Labour movement is declining or broken down (Valen 1981; Bjørklund and Hagtvet 1981; Whiteley 1982; Clouch 1982). Even in the Labour party of Norway with its traditional emphasis on membership mobilization, there is uncertainty about the electoral benefits of the membership. The organizational report concludes, however, that a high m/v ratio seems to be linked to smaller electoral variations.

The declining difference in organizational structure between socialist and non-socialist parties can be seen as part of a general change from class-based social democratic mass parties and class-based non-socialist cadre parties, to "catch all" parties, limiting the level of possible political integration (Kirchheimer 1969; Duverger 1967).

b. *The "survival" model and the political party.* The rational behaviour model sees the activity of the organization as mainly resulting from factors internal to the organization itself. While the environmental impact is taken into account, the thrust of the model is still to emphasize organizational behaviour as originating from *within* the organization. Contrary to this perspective the survival model, or the fire station model (March & Simon 1958) sees organizations as mainly *responding* to challenges created by the environment. In this

sense the activity performed by organizations is understood as a way to protect its existence against challenges from the outside. This is particularly the case when unexpected events occur. The difference between the rational and the fire station model lies in the former's use of *strategy*. In the fire station model the pressure from the environment is such that there is little capacity to deal with problems not perceived to be of vital importance for the organization's existence. Wilson (1973) has argued that the main goal of organization is survival. This model reduces organizational behaviour to be reaction to environmental challenges. Implicit here is that an organization acting within this model is constrained by:

- a) a shortage of resources to carry out necessary activities,
- b) a time perspective that is strongly based towards immediate needs while long-term considerations are constantly pushed in the background.

The desire to survive as units is strong among organizations. This can be seen in the resistance shown by local branches faced with the threat of mergers. Restructuring of the organizational network is normally seen as a way to create more efficient organizations. Local branches that face mergers with other branches will frequently resist this — regardless of the rationality behind such plans. In extreme cases where the resources of the organization are stretched to the limits, even the most vital tasks can be considered a potential hazard to the organization. The case of the New Liberal party in Norway illustrates the point very well. This party, a split off from the Liberals in 1972, has suffered continuous defeats in the general and local elections since it first took part in 1973. This fall there will be local and provincial elections. In one of the party's strongholds, the province of Rogaland, the New Liberals have announced that they will not nominate any candidates for the provincial elections. The official explanation is that another serious electoral defeat simply will break the back of even the most enthusiastic party supporters. This is indeed an extreme case, as nominating candidates is the *sine qua non* of political parties. However, the point can be made more general. Party organizations functioning mainly as "electoral machines" are essentially operating under this model. The election is a challenge from the outside, demanding action from the organization. Afterwards it returns to its pre-election low activity. This type of organization seems to have been typical of the non-socialist parties in the 1950 and 1960s in Norway (Valen & Katz 1964, 63-85). In the Conservative party in this period it was very difficult to find people willing to commit themselves and undertake responsibilities at the local level (Lindbeck 1981).

The relevance of the survival model tends to increase with decreasing general resources. This is partly a vicious circle — few resources limit the activity

level, while little activity does not generate more resources. It is interesting in this perspective that in an internal booklet on how to run local party branches in the Liberal party it is mentioned that campaign activity may be a great stimulus for the organization. It is never claimed that the activity of the local branch will influence the election result (Veivaag et al. 1977).

But the activity level is not only caused by a resource limit. It is also a sign of how important the organization is seen to be for the performance of the party in elections. If parties do not see any such connection, we cannot really expect a great deal of activity. This leads over to the third model — the bureaucratic perspective.

c) *The political party as bureaucratic element.* While the two first models may be seen as equally relevant for the local as well as for the national organization, the *bureaucratic model* is particularly suited to the lower level organization. In this perspective organizational action is mainly the result of the organization's location in an authority structure. The local organization receives orders taken higher up in the structure and implements them according to instructions. In this sense, it is not an activity based on means-goal relationship (at the local level), nor is it an action to fend off an environmental challenge or a symbolic action. Organizational routine commands the organization to respond according to instructions. The important aspect of this model is that the locus of decision-making is essentially outside the local organizational unit itself.

Wilson (1973) argues that the problem organizational leaders face is not to preserve their own interests against the wishes of the masses — as Michels saw it — but to get the masses activated. Applying this perspective on organizations rather than on individuals, it follows that local organizations have to be told what to do, otherwise there will not be very much activity. In this sense we may speak of the local party organization as acting within a bureaucratic model. Implicit here is that little work will be done unless there is stimulus to such activity from the outside. Lack of local generated activity is a combination of lack of knowledge as well as of political engagement. In the organizational handbook of the Liberal party it is pointed out that low membership attendance is often the result of bad leadership. What kind of activity that is carried out and the means applied for this will then not necessarily be the result of characteristics of the local associations, but of units higher up in the hierarchy. The Liberal party clearly acknowledged this problem. Speaking of the relationship between local and provincial associations, the handbook said: "We know the local branches frequently feel isolated, and that their activity is totally dependent on local initiative. We also know that most branches would like this to be different, and that better contact with among others the provincial leadership would be stimulating

as well as useful for the practical work". (Veivåg et al. 1977, 83). In terms of this model then, when local party branches run membership recruitment campaigns they seldom do so on their own initiative but because of central initiative. One example is the Norwegian Communist Party, which in the 1950's tried to build new local branches and even increased its participation in local elections in a period of strong electoral decline. This can be seen as an organized strategy for stopping the process of decline (Selle & Svåsand 1983). The same strategy is now apparent in Vest-Agder, the main area of the Christian People's Party. After an electoral defeat in the late 1970's, the party has been able to increase its membership considerably. Such organized strategies can stop a further decline (Eikeland 1982, 10).

The linkage in a bureaucratic structure also helps explain why membership figures are seldom accurate. Frequently size of local membership is used as criteria to distribute benefits within the organizations, such as allocating the number of delegates to be sent to provincial or national conventions. In addition, few local associations will have the necessary bureaucratic capacity to constantly update their membership files. Nor would they be particularly interested in doing so: Showing declining membership would be a signal of bad performance to those higher up in the organization.

d) *Politics as symbolic action*. A fourth type of explanation sees organizational action as *symbolic activity*, meaning that what organizations are doing may not be seen in an instrumental but in an expressive perspective. In this model a specific type of action may not derive from an analysis of means-goals relationship, nor because it is the organization's way of dealing with a crucial challenge, but because it is a symbol of the organization's existence.

We do not know much about the exact lines of communication and the extent of information up and down in the classical studies (Michels 1962; Duverger 1967; Neuman 1956). Primarily individual positions are discussed, also a characteristic of the whole tradition of elitism (Torgersen 1969). There is not much on politics, about the decision-making process in political parties. The problem is that while party membership is essentially local, the policy one responds to is to a great extent worked out at a national level. We do not have enough information about how internal and external political information reaches the member (or voter), and even less about how he or she "translates" this information. We therefore have no exact understanding of the importance of local cleavages and specific local problems for political attitudes and action. Even more problematic is the lack of knowledge about how attitudes are transformed into action.

This means it is very problematic to decide to what extent political action is instrumental or cultural/symbolic action. Perhaps we will find more or less of these ideal-typical classifications depending on the period under study,

the type of party and not the least, the geographical context. An underlying dimension in Kirschheimer's very interesting article (1969) is that the change from class-based party to "catch-all" parties is also a change towards more instrumental action.

A short discussion of the "ethnoculturalist" tradition in USA illuminates some of these problems. One looks at local questions and cultural symbols as most important to explain political action. McCormick sums up the perspective like this: "They believe that the economic programs of state and national leaders are related to aspirations of culturally oriented voters at the grass-roots level with the image, aura or character a political party project. The implication of "party character" is that voters respond most basically to party symbolism, not policies" (McCormick 1974, 357). It is an approach that understates the importance of cleavages at a local level, but without taking into account the political content, the policy. One takes very much for granted that the options of the leaders reflect the interests of the masses, and one does not link ecological and individual characteristics. Alldén's analysis (1980) on the members of the Socialist People's party shows strong relationships between ecological characteristics and organizational (and individual) behaviour. The ecology did not only affect the social composition of the members, but also the m/v ratio and even the length of the individual membership (Alldén 1980, chap. 9). This means the ecology influenced the forms of political activities and the political content. Even for the same political party politics is more or less instrumental or cultural/symbolic depending on local characteristics.

In our opinion the symbolic approach is interesting and can be linked to and seen as complementary to the instrumental approach. It is always necessary to analyse the private motives of the elites and long-term social and political change to be able to decide if and under what conditions symbolic action is transformed into instrumental action and vice versa.

The four models — the rational, the survival, the bureaucratic, and the symbolic — offer alternative perspectives on how political parties may look upon certain of their activities. It is very likely that *how* the organization carries out its tasks will depend on which of these models does not fit. The examples illustrating the relevance of the various organizational behaviour models contain an important warning for us. As we can find examples from various kinds of parties under each of these models, it means it is probably not possible to develop a *general* theory of party organizations. Although each party on the *national* level may deviate clearly from other parties, it does not follow that each local branch will be equally easy to categorize. Beneath the national level there are probably less differences between various political parties.

Organizational Boundaries and Membership

The organizational behaviour models are useful in the sense that they point at the way organization may deal with their environment. We may apply this notion further by looking at how party organizations may influence the mobilization of members by manipulation of the “boundary” between itself and the environment. Schaeffer & Huang (1975), among others, have pointed out that the kind of people who are attracted to an organization will depend on various kind of barriers. The higher the barrier, the more motivated the individual must be to pass and the easier it is to build up a strong party identity. On the other hand, the “quality” of members will probably also vary a lot. Only the Labour party in Norway has two kinds of membership, individual and collective. Unions may affiliate as a whole or for parts of their membership with the local Labour party branches. At the national level, 30% of the party’s members are collectively affiliated. This, however, disguises enormous regional variations. In Oslo, nearly $\frac{2}{3}$ of the membership is collective, while there are no collective members in the two northern provinces — in spite of the very strong electoral support for the party there.

The distinction between the collective and the individual membership is one of the differences in barriers. Through collective membership one can become party member without any personal initiative. The recent organization report clearly speaks of very little involvement in party affairs from the Union members. However, the point is probably more general; the easier it is to become members, the less likely that *membership* will lead to *activity*. Crouch (1982) in his analysis of the relationship between the British Labour party and the Union points out important negative consequences of collective membership. “The form taken by the union connection may have inhibited Labour’s growth as a mass membership party, partly by providing a false sense of large size and reducing the need for members as a source of revenue, and partly by reducing the GLP’s to a marginal role in decision-making’ (Crouch 1982, 179). This fact lowers the level of organizational activity. Whiteley (1982) goes even further and says it seems likely that the decline of membership in Labour “is primarily caused by the decline in activists, since it is the latter who service and maintain the former” (Whiteley 1982, 128), a very interesting theory. Thus, when parties start recruitment campaigns they may get a lot of new members — but not necessarily of the highly motivated kind. This can have strong negative long-term consequences for the party organization. We could expect that the number of recruited persons will be greater the more the organization invests in mobilization activity. But the *effect* of the recruitment, in terms of activity and loyalty, is the inverse of this. The increase in party membership which may be observed over the years and the general decline in party identification at the same time in Norway

may reflect these twin processes: the parties — and particularly the conservatives — have invested heavily in membership mobilization. By doing so, the conservatives have also forced other parties to do the same.

Two other types of barriers working in the same way should be noticed:

- the organization as a social collectivity,
- membership recruitment in various *phases* of party development.

The party is also a collectivity serving social functions. In this way, the organization's "image", with its expectations towards members and its degree of exclusiveness, will in reality present various barriers *against* participation. The composition of the local branch and its "image" outwards will influence the possibility of attracting new members. For instance the Conservative party has until recently consisted mainly of middle- and upper-class people. With this image, a local party organization will not look very attractive for working- or lower-middle class people who might be willing and interested in becoming members.

Similarly, the left socialist party has often presented an image of having very devoted party members willing to carry out office work, organize canvassing etc., which could have a negative effect upon membership mobilization. A *too high* activity could frighten potential members who would not be *that much* committed to the party. However, the reverse of this also seems to occur. In the Labour party's organizational report, it is acknowledged that new and motivated members are often disillusioned because *their* expectations are not met. The net effect, they say, is that a small percentage of the membership carries the burden of administering the party organization, while at the same time many who might be willing to accept responsibility and work for the party remain passive. It is also likely that the point in time *when* people join parties will be associated with the strength of their *commitment* to the party. Therefore, we will assume that there is a difference between people who join a party when this is in *decline*, and those joining when the party is *increasing in strength*.

In an earlier paper (Svåsand 1981), it was discussed how organizational and electoral strength co-varied. There are instances where a decline in electoral strength is followed by organizational improvement. The general relationship seems to be that organizational efforts are closely linked to *negative* experiences. To join parties in decline may be considered as passing a higher barrier than to join parties on the increase. We will expect that those joining in decline periods — and particularly those joining out of their own personal initiative — will be much more motivated, and therefore more active, than people joining at other times. Allén (1980) also found that these people remained members for the longest period. This is why it is so difficult, we

think, to develop general categories for party organizations for different periods in party history.

Party Organizations and the Exit of Members

In this section we will, on a general level, discuss possible changes in the relationship between political goals and the political market. As a starting point we will take an ideal-typical classification of political markets and political goals, being aware that in the real world we will always find intermediate forms. In addition, as mentioned earlier in this paper, political goals are difficult to classify and are far from unambiguous. At the same time, Fig. 1 is better suited for ideological differences as compared to more practical ones — debate about short-term policies. However, most people will agree there is a covariation between political goals and possible supporters. A discussion of changes here throws, in our opinion, light over important structural changes of Norwegian politics during the last 15 years or so, changes that have long-term consequences for the party organization as a unit.

It is necessary to analyse the changing social composition of parties in relation to ideological change. What is the consequence of the transformation towards “Catch-all” parties for politics in general? How does this change the political market, the organizational structure and political goals? How do voters and members, both as individuals and groups, react towards these changes? How does the level of political activity and its forms change? How do alternative channels of political action affect party politics and what are the internal and external rules of political communization? Are political parties more bureaucratic than 15 years ago? Here there are more questions than real answers. The dynamic relation between different levels of politics is very difficult to catch, impossible to measure by any “static” method.

While electoral participation can be seen as a cultural norm in Norway, this is far from true concerning party membership. About 16% of the electors are members. Out of these, ca. 4% are classified as activists and ca. 6% as completely passive members. However, studies have shown differences between parties in level and types of activities (Valen & Katz 1964; Martinus-

Figure 1. The relationship between the political market and political goals.

		Same	Different
Market	Same	100% competition	Debate about ideas — ideology
	Different	Strong segmentation	No competition

sen 1973; Lindbekk 1981). The Labour party was nearest the typical mass party ideal with an extensive organizational network and a high level of participation, while the non-socialist parties were closer to the cadre-party ideal with a low level of activity except during election times. But this was in the 1950's and 1960's, and we really do not know much about changes over time and the differences between parties today. We think empiric studies in this field will give crucial information about political change in Norway in general. Such studies can answer how suitable our four models are and indicate if there has been a shift from more cultural/symbolic political action to instrumental ways of expressing oneself politically.

What we do know is that important changes in the Norwegian political landscape have occurred. New parties have come into being and the strength of the main parties has changed dramatically. While the total socialist support in the whole period 1945-1969 was considerably above 50%, in the late 1970's and early 1980's it was not far above 40%. At the same time the parties in the centre of Norwegian politics have decreased from ca. 30% to 20%. The most important change is perhaps on the right. Far to the right we have got a new party around the 5% level and in addition the Conservative party has increased its support from between 17%-20% in the period 1945-1969, to 31.3% during the election of 1981. Since 1978 the number of members has increased from ca. 113,000 to 176,000 in 1982 (Svåsand 1983); this is an organizational revolution. Not only is the Conservative party the government party for the first time in 50 years, the party has also the most extensive organizational network and even more members than the Labour party, now having about 153,000 members.

We think this change is of crucial importance for political sociology to explain, and is related to the extensive structural transformation of the post-war society (Valen 1981; Bjørklund & Hagtvet 1981). Election studies have shown important changes in political attitudes and preferences (Borre 1982; Crewe 1982; Heinberg 1981; Valen 1981; Worre 1979). The strong ties between socio-economic status and political attitudes have declined considerably. Status can no longer predict political action to the same extent; this is especially true among young voters. Borre (1982) goes as far to say that class voting is on its way out of Danish politics, a tendency that is not that clear in Norway, at least not yet (Valen 1981). While the dominance of working-class voters voting Labour is going down, ca. 20% of the members of the Trade Union voted for the Conservative party in 1981. At the same time the Conservative party has got high support in the former main areas of the traditionally important "counter-cultures", in areas that up to now have been dominated by the parties in the political centre. In addition, research shows that the ideological distance between the main parties has been decreasing, making it easier to switch from one party to another. This means

that the individual stability of the voter is declining. Political issues are growing more important for individual political decisions, perhaps interpreted into a new ideological context.

The main explanation of these important changes has been the decreasing importance of political subcultures in Norway. The Labour movement as a real movement has been in decline since the 1950's. This means that the possibility of a strong political socialization of the working class is less than before, a working class with more complicated crosscutting solidarities. At the same time the extent of and the intensity in the "counter-cultures" have also decreased, especially in the temperance movement and the "New Norwegian" movement (Valen 1981; Bjørklund & Hagtvet 1981). Altogether this means that the most important thresholds against conservative expansion are breaking down or declining.

These political transformations understate important changes in the political market of different parties, changing the level of competition. The first row in Fig. 1 is of increasing importance. Even among workers and people related to the "counter-cultures", the Conservative party now competes, and at a general level one can say that the possible market for all parties is increasing, when it comes to social and regional background. Today, we think it is only the Christian People's Party — out of the parties looking at themselves as "catch-all" parties — which has a kind of segment of its own. People are now moving directly from the Labour party to the Conservative party and vice-versa to a much larger extent than before (Valen 1981, chap. 15), indicating the decreasing importance of political subculture and a decreasing intensity in political identification and loyalty.

The exact information about membership trends is much more superficial. A main problem here is that membership is directly related to what the parties are doing themselves, to what extent they change their policies of recruitment. Despite the slow increase in that total membership in Norwegian parties during the 1970's, we still think the individual stability concerning members is also going down. The cost of exit is decreasing because of weakening political loyalty (Hirschman 1970). However, we do not think this is a main distinction between members and voters. In empirical research what is important is the continuing line from voters via members to leaders. An important objection to Hirschman (1970) is that in his discussion on exit, voice and loyalty he does not take up this problem. The incentives will be very different on different levels. One hypothesis can be that the use of voice is increasing along this dimension and also the conditions favouring exit will vary greatly at different levels. Studies of parties from within will give important knowledge about conditions favouring "within system exit" and "within system voice" and how these relations are changing over time in different levels of the party organization.

The development towards “catch-all” parties makes it even more necessary than before to look for internal coalitions and conflicts. Important cleavages can exist not only between parties, but also through parties (Raschke 1977). It will be of interest to analyse how organized and permanent such coalitions are and what the conflict is all about. Conflicts about symbols increase the possibility of exit (Obershall 1972; Wilson 1973). If modern politics is less about zero-sum questions, but more about bargaining on more or less, we consider that the level of collective exit is going down.

From the individual’s point of view, the political transformation means more alternatives and a lower cost of exit. If this is so, one comes nearer to a market situation in a more economic sense. Perhaps this increases the relevance of microeconomic models and game theoretical approaches towards politics (Hirschman 1970, 1981; Downs 1959). At any rate, one also has to look at the macro-conditions. The new alternatives can be choices among evils and can actually increase political alienation and apathy. However, also from the parties’ point of view, the possible choices are increasing. The lowering of individual political loyalty and political integration increase the possibility of reorientation and reorganization. Whatever the organizational structure and historical background, one will find organizational and political “slack” (Simon 1954; Dahl 1973; Hirschman 1970). One seeks sub-optimization in order to survive or increase support when the external or internal environment is changing. It is, in this perspective, of crucial importance to analyse the changing relationship between alternative channels of political expression and influence. It is even possible that the increasing alternatives on an individual level increase the importance of party organization as an agent of mobilization. If politics is less about crucial cleavages, and has to operate within a system of decreasing political loyalties, then one should regard the importance of *policies* as increasing. As an individual one responds to a greater extent towards what is done and has to be done. This makes it easier for the big and “visible” parties, parties in a governmental position or with possibilities of being in such a situation. However, the situation makes the parties even more vulnerable, increasing the importance of the quality of the party’s organization for electoral success.

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