

Michels Revisited: Autonomous Cliques in a Small Political System

The Norwegian Institute for Atomic Energy (IFA), 1949–79

Svein S. Andersen, Norwegian School of Management, Oslo

Elite autonomy is often discussed in relation to oligarchic tendencies within organizations. The article demonstrates how autonomy of elites may have a more stable basis if it rests on inter-elite support. The focus is on the role of autonomous, tightly coupled, and exclusive elite networks characterized by jointly held perceptions and reciprocity – cliques – in a small political system, such as in Norway. The argument is based on a study of the Norwegian Institute of Atomic Energy and its political environment, 1949–79. The formation and survival of autonomous cliques are stimulated by properties of small and tightly knit political systems: (1) transiency, (2) scarcity of qualified personnel, (3) consensus on national goals, and (4) elites' need to protect themselves from judgements based on strong egalitarian norms. The existence of autonomous cliques in a policy area has important implications for: (1) political entrepreneurship, (2) organizational development, and (3) legitimacy in relation to the environment. The management and control via informal clique organization have received little attention. Thus, this study serves as a supplement to the literature on bureaucratic politics and organization theory.

The Role of 'Cliques' in a Negotiation Society

Studies of public policy-making in Norway, as in many other Western countries, have in recent years been directed towards negotiations. Some focus on the coupling between different political institutions and systems of coordination and control (Hernes 1978). Others have stressed arbitrary and loose couplings (Olsen 1978). However, policy-making is always studied in relation to traditional political-administrative arenas. To the degree that elite networks have been given attention, members have been regarded as *representatives* for organizations and groups and not as *participants in their own right*.

It is commonly argued that in a small and tightly knit political system, as in Norway, political elites are operating under strict democratic control, as representatives. Here we are concerned with elite networks which constitute autonomous cliques. Usually, cliques are defined as small, exclusive, and tightly knit sets of actors (Knoke & Kuklinski 1982). Internally, cliques are characterized by shared views and a strong sense of reciprocity.

Michels Revisited: Autonomous Cliques in a Small Political System

The Norwegian Institute for Atomic Energy (IFA), 1949–79

Svein S. Andersen, Norwegian School of Management, Oslo

Elite autonomy is often discussed in relation to oligarchic tendencies within organizations. The article demonstrates how autonomy of elites may have a more stable basis if it rests on inter-elite support. The focus is on the role of autonomous, tightly coupled, and exclusive elite networks characterized by jointly held perceptions and reciprocity – cliques – in a small political system, such as in Norway. The argument is based on a study of the Norwegian Institute of Atomic Energy and its political environment, 1949–79. The formation and survival of autonomous cliques are stimulated by properties of small and tightly knit political systems: (1) transiency, (2) scarcity of qualified personnel, (3) consensus on national goals, and (4) elites' need to protect themselves from judgements based on strong egalitarian norms. The existence of autonomous cliques in a policy area has important implications for: (1) political entrepreneurship, (2) organizational development, and (3) legitimacy in relation to the environment. The management and control via informal clique organization have received little attention. Thus, this study serves as a supplement to the literature on bureaucratic politics and organization theory.

The Role of 'Cliques' in a Negotiation Society

Studies of public policy-making in Norway, as in many other Western countries, have in recent years been directed towards negotiations. Some focus on the coupling between different political institutions and systems of coordination and control (Hernes 1978). Others have stressed arbitrary and loose couplings (Olsen 1978). However, policy-making is always studied in relation to traditional political-administrative arenas. To the degree that elite networks have been given attention, members have been regarded as *representatives* for organizations and groups and not as *participants in their own right*.

It is commonly argued that in a small and tightly knit political system, as in Norway, political elites are operating under strict democratic control, as representatives. Here we are concerned with elite networks which constitute autonomous cliques. Usually, cliques are defined as small, exclusive, and tightly knit sets of actors (Knoke & Kuklinski 1982). Internally, cliques are characterized by shared views and a strong sense of reciprocity.

In relation to the environment, such elite networks may operate with a considerable degree of autonomy from institutions where actors get their resources.

The idea of elite autonomy is often related to the concept of oligarchy. Michels's (1962) classical study shows how leaders tend to pursue independent personal interest, while controlling the articulation of membership preferences. However, when oligarchic tendencies are strong, considerable leadership energies go into preserving control over the organization, due to the tensions between leader and member interests. For this reason oligarchic leaders will have little time and resources to pursue major projects and goals outside of their organizational domain (Field et al. 1988, 6).

As Lipset (1960) has pointed out, the degree of oligarchy in an organization is inversely related to leadership competition. In a similar vein Valen (1964) has demonstrated how oligarchic tendencies are contingent on a 'rubber' rather than an 'iron' law. However, as in Michels's original work, the focus of these contributions is on the relation between leaders and members *within* the organization.

This article is concerned with networks of leaders holding elite status, organized as cliques. Not only are members of such cliques autonomous in relation to members of their organizations, but as collectives they also enjoy considerable freedom from other elites and the political and administrative system within which they operate. Competition among national political elite groups around particular policy areas is limited. It is based on mutual respect, willingness to compromise, and respect for each other's territory. Heated elections or parliamentary debates may occur, but often they are more symbolic than real (Røed-Larsen 1977).

The major thesis is that properties of small and tightly knit political systems stimulate the growth of autonomous elite networks, composed of leaders who are not absorbed in the control of their organizations. Rather, leaders' control of organizations to a large extent rests on their position in a national elite system. This may be the basis for elite autonomy and the formation of cliques with considerable freedom to pursue political goals that clique members believe in, independent of the organizations they lead.

The existence of such cliques does not, however, necessarily imply corruption or the wheeling and dealing associated with similar arrangements in many countries, for instance the United States. In small and tightly knit political systems, with a low degree of elite competition, cliques are also exploiting the high degree of trust between elite representatives, on the one hand, and between elites and their constituencies, on the other. However, in some small countries such tendencies may be modified by cleavages related to religion and culture, dividing national elites.

We will elaborate on the meaning of such factors and what they imply

for the relations between political organizations and their environment, particularly with respect to:

- (1) political entrepreneurship,
- (2) organizational development, and
- (3) legitimacy.

The working of a clique will be demonstrated by the political games surrounding the Norwegian Institute of Atomic Energy – IFA – over the period 1949–79. However, first we need to elaborate our concepts of elite network and clique in more detail.

Cliques as Mediators Between Organizations and Environment

Owing to the clique supporting IFA, the Institute received a major part of public funds for R&D over a period of 30 years, for a long time about 50 percent (see Figure 1). Members of the IFA clique were located not only at the Institute, but also in other key institutions related to national policy-making on research and industry. The core persons all had central positions in the Labour Party which was in government for most of this period.

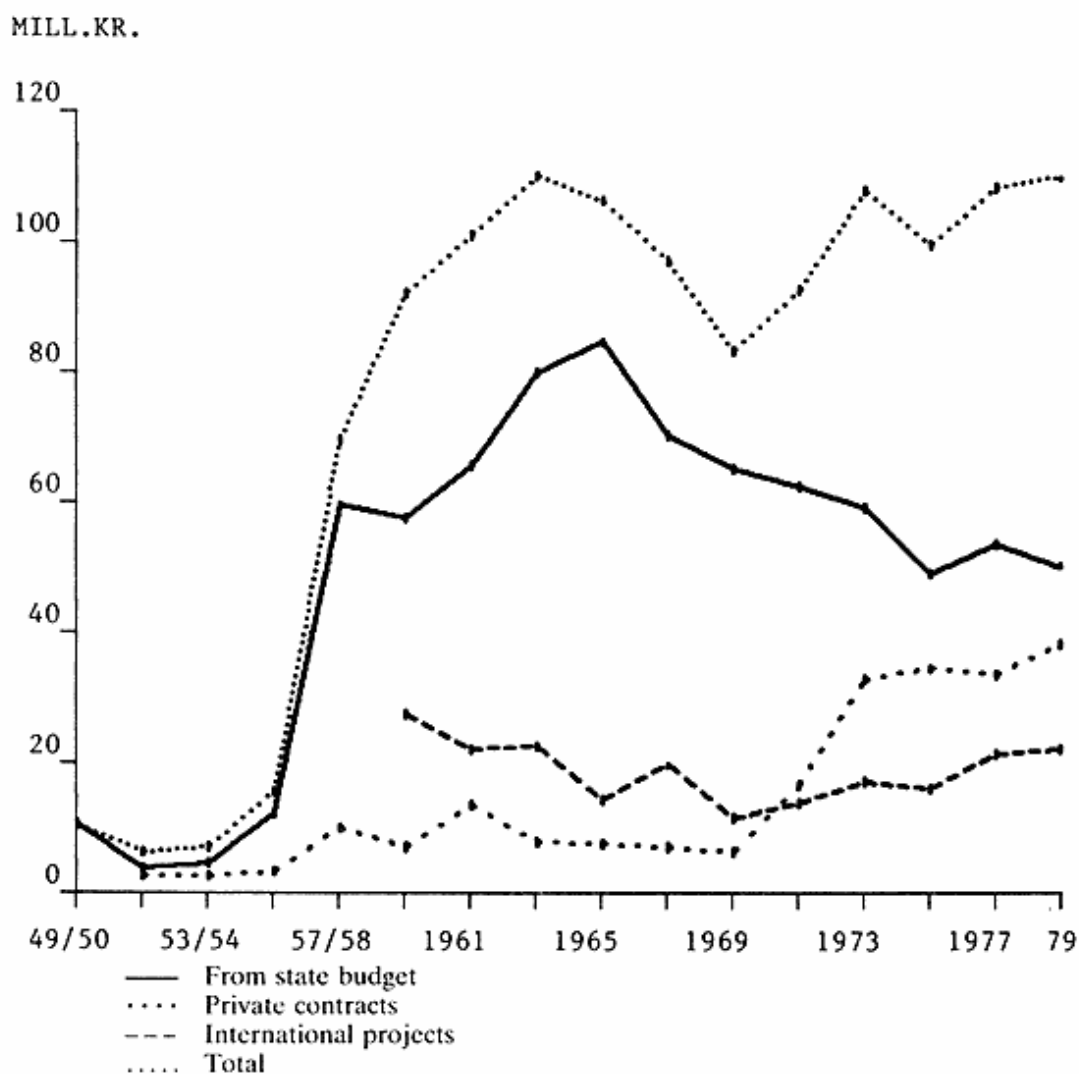
The role of the IFA clique changed over time:

- (1) 1949–59: *Entrepreneurs*. The creation of the Institute took only a few years, but the development of a political and administrative infrastructure to mobilize support emerged over a period of 10 years.
- (2) 1959–69: *Buffers against external pressures*. Here the members of the clique exploited both their general status and the support system they had created to ‘disarm’ the growing number of critiques.
- (3) 1969–80: *Distant protectors of the Institute and the political-administrative system they had created*. They were no longer directly involved, but their prestige helped to provide the Institute with resources to reorganize in the face of mounting political pressures against atomic energy research.

The history of IFA demonstrates how a clique can provide an organization with considerable autonomy *vis-à-vis* both market constraints and the political-administrative system. This picture strongly contradicts the image of Norway as an extraordinarily open society, where no exceptions are made for political elites, and where there is always a channel available to exert influence from below (Olsen 1982).

IFA is an extreme case, but certain properties of the Norwegian system seem to open up for clique influence, reflecting the fact that it is small, homogeneous, and egalitarian:

- (1) *Transparency of the national political system*. Elites in different areas



Source: Annual Reports of Royal Norwegian Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (NTNF)

Fig. 1. Budget for IFA (Indexed According to Cost of Living 1979).

know of each other, and seem to believe that they have a certain overview which makes it possible to control negative consequences if something goes wrong.

(2) *National scarcity of qualified persons.* There has to be a division on tasks, based on trust and respect for each other's turfs.

(3) *Consensus on national goals.* Mutual trust is coupled with cooperative attitudes. There is a lack of adversary roles.

(4) *Elites need to protect themselves from judgements based on strong egalitarian norms.* Egalitarian attitudes imply that elites should also be

measured against ideal norms. Elites have a common interest in shielding their activities from the wider public.

Such properties create a special environment for the emergence of cliques as collective actors. Such cliques are:

- based on mutuality and trust, rather than competition and exchange;
- autonomous from societal interests as well as the political-administrative system, rather than tightly controlled representatives.

The importance of personal networks in politics has been illustrated in studies of power elites (Mills 1956; Dahl 1961) and the increasing focus on the segmentation and collegiate nature of management (Moren 1974; Egeberg et al. 1974; Olsen 1978). In addition, studies of economic firms have outlined a similar coupling and reciprocity between companies (Albrechtsen 1975). In US organization theory this is referred to as 'interlocking directorates' (Useem 1980; Palmer 1983).

Common to these approaches is the idea of political control via dominant coalitions which cross organizational borders (Cyert & March 1983; Pfeffer & Salancik 1978). Such networks also constitute arenas in which individuals act as representatives of different interests. Persons may represent social class, professional interests, organizational affiliation, general social mandates, or affected party.

Consistent with these perspectives, networks are often viewed as reflecting strategic cooperation between organizations, based on overlap between competing interests. The acquisition of strategic benefits is built on control of information and sanctions. A typical example is found in interlocking directorates.

Another type of network is characterized by common interests and perspectives. A special case is when communality is based on professional norms or expertise. In this type of network, legitimacy is based on shared norms, values, and demands for consistency. A clique of the type found around IFA is in certain respects similar to this latter type. However, both the quality of internal interaction and the legitimacy of members in relation to the wider political system differ from what we find in the literature:

Internally, membership is legitimated with reference to general values and a great deal of trust. Mutual benefits are not tied to individual terms of trade, but instead confirm common values and interests that exist independent of a certain arena. The parties walk hand in hand towards a common future. Group cohesion is not a reflection of tactics or external norms of rationality. *Externally*, in relation to the strategic environment, the position of clique members is based on trust and respect. They are national opinion leaders in their area, often with international recognition. Members are not representatives in the sense that they routinely have to report back to con-

stituencies and to get their mandates confirmed. Legitimacy rests in persons with a position in the national elite system. Such positions provide a more stable basis for elite autonomy than if oligarchic relations depend solely on support from members of their organizations.

We should keep in mind, however, that conditions for the emergence of autonomous cliques in some small countries may be modified by cleavages dividing elites, and thereby reducing generalized trust in the system. Such divisions are most often related to religion or culture (The Netherlands, Belgium). However, the existence of such countervailing forces in some countries does not contradict our major argument.

To summarize: IFA was a small, exclusive group organized as a personal network, but kept together by factors unrelated to its members' organizational affiliation or social class. Internally, sanctions or specific demands played a minor role. The relation of the clique to the wider system was based on wide and unspecified personal mandates.

Some may argue that the clique formation described here represents an exception, perhaps a form of immorality. Others will regard this as a natural form of social organization. Cliques are probably not an unusual form of political direction and control, but theories of politics and administration have paid little attention to this phenomenon.

In the following analysis we will focus on the role of the IFA clique as a coupling between the Institute and its environment. First, however, we need to place the IFA clique within the Norwegian political tradition and describe its members in more detail.

The IFA Clique: Special, But Not Unique

Norway was the first country outside the five major nuclear powers to get a reactor into operation (1951). The state-financed IFA was intended to be a cornerstone in 'the industrial state' developing after the Second World War, wherein the state took upon itself considerable responsibility for industrial development and growth. Atomic energy is the single most important area of Norwegian technical research in the post-war period.

IFA's development illustrates the fact that formal structures create grey areas which may be exploited by influential cliques. The potential for autonomous elite action seems to be favored by characteristics of small and tightly knit political systems. This is particularly the case when one political party dominates, as was the case in Norway, 1945–65, when the Labour Party held the majority in the Parliament. Different forms of such influence in the Norwegian system have been described by historians and social scientists. In his analysis of the 'one party system', Seip (1963) illustrates how a small group directed Norway through control over the Labour

Party organization. Close social contact, often in connection with outdoor activities, was the framework for this kind of government.

This example emphasizes the formal organization of authority. Control over a party with a majority in the Parliament made it possible to transform clique agreements into authoritative and formal decisions. The IFA case shows how positions in different organizations provide resources for the creation of new activity and secure legitimacy for this.

Torgersen (1977) has outlined the conditions for puppeteers or private cabinet members to act in their own interest, as exemplified by Ræstad of the Liberal Party, who had his 'golden age' in the inter-war period: It was said that 'he sat everywhere – even on the committee which had been created to control himself' (1977, 60). Torgersen's example outlines the importance of political generalists with entrepreneur-type personalities. Here we describe how a group of such individuals operates. A network is a special type of informal organization that can play a decisive role as a form of coupling between formal organizations and their strategic environment.

The focus on the IFA clique makes it necessary to take a closer look at its individual members. Their positions were the basis for their activity as entrepreneurs. Three individuals had key roles in the political game surrounding the development of the IFA: Gunnar Randers, Finn Lied, and Jens Christian Hauge. The Institute was founded when they were between 30 and 35 years of age.

The first is a specialist on atomic energy. The other two have later played a very important role in national policy-making on research and industry. In the dictionary of the Left socialists in Norway, they are characterized in the following way (*Pax Leksikon* 1980, 82):

A special type of party boss is the dynamic technocrat, like Finn Lied or Jens Christian Hauge, who on the basis of their technical competence and political insight can play the role of the technical specialist among politicians and the other way around. This way they are able to acquire great influence.

Of special importance for the position of the clique members was their central location in the Labour Party hierarchy. This is particularly true for the two generalists. Figure 2 shows key positions of the IFA clique in the period from 1949 to 1979. (A similar overview of a Swedish technocratic structure is found in Dørfer 1973.)

As Torgersen (1977, 60–61) has pointed out, 'grey eminences' depend on general support, trust, and confidence from other politicians and colleagues. Their influence as opinion leaders may be direct or indirect, through a comprehensive network with its own structure and many local contacts. Influence is exercised through consultancy within research and energy policy circles, and in addition, through companies such as Noratom and Scanpower A/S created in relation to IFA.

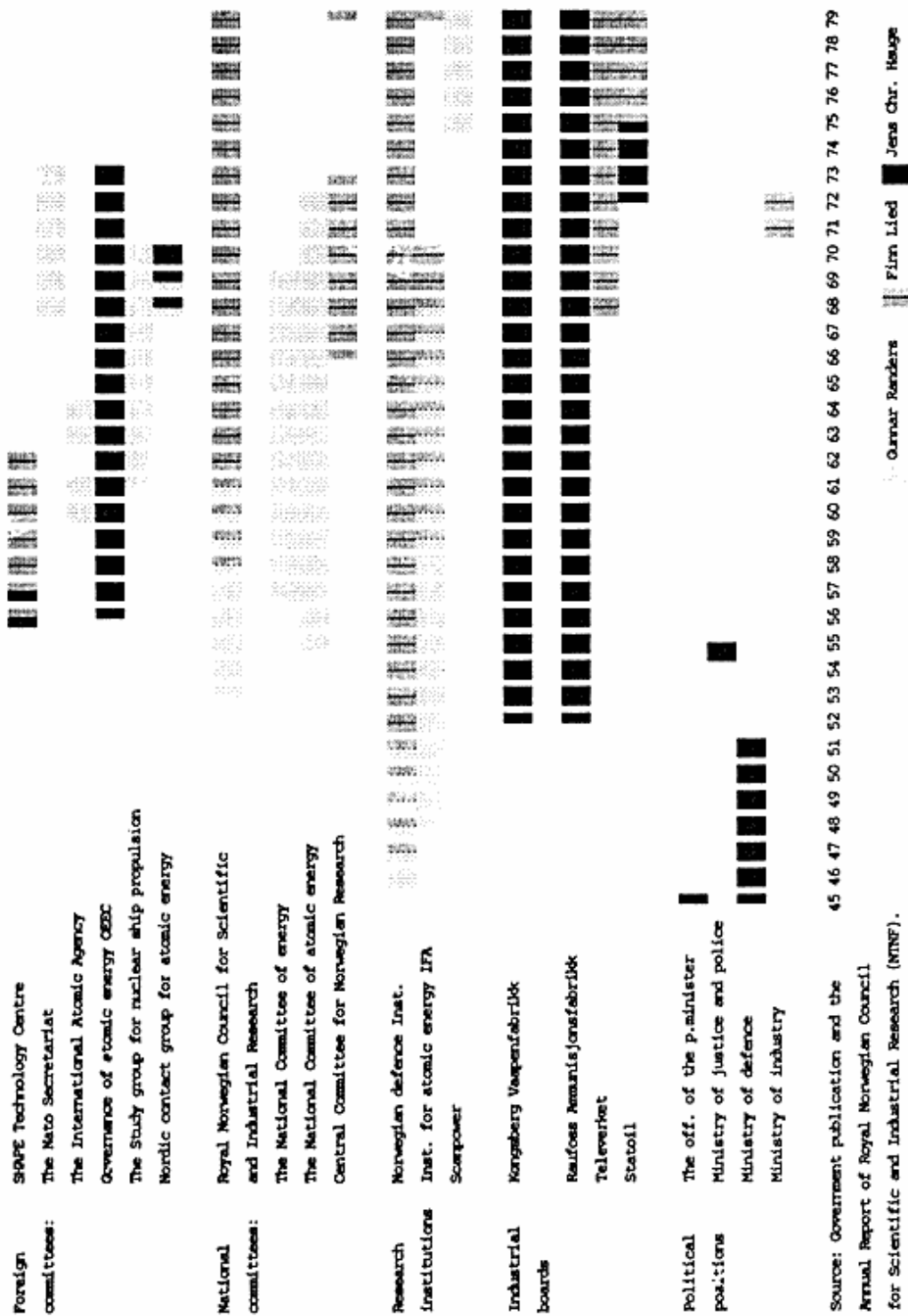


Fig. 2. Key Positions of the IFA Clique, 1949-79.

There is a striking complementarity with respect to educational background and activities of the clique members:

Gunnar Randers was the specialist. He was originally educated as an astronomer. Later on he studied nuclear physics in the United States and became enthusiastically engaged in the question of its possible peaceful applications. He was with the Defense Research Institute (FFI) from the time it was established. As leader of the IFA from 1948 to 1968 he also played a central role in national policy-making concerning technical and scientific research.

Finn Lied was a civil engineer from the Norwegian Institute of Technology in Trondheim. He was research director of the Defence Research Institute from 1957 and later general director. He was the chairman of IFA's board from 1960 to 1970. He has been one of the most prominent generalists in Norwegian post-war industrial and research politics. Lied was minister of industry in the Bratteli government, 1971–72 and chairman of the board of the Norwegian State Oil Company from 1974 to 1984.

Jens Christian Hauge served for some time as IFA's legal counselor, but was first and foremost a generalist. As defense minister he was an important mainstay for IFA in earlier years. He was the chairman of the board in Kongsberg Ammunitions and Raufoss Ammunitions from the early 1950s. He was also Lied's predecessor as chairman of the board of the State Oil Company, from 1972 to 1974.

The mapping of the positions of these key individuals in the post-war period illustrates that they had the opportunity to take initiatives in policy-making on research and industry, and to operate as mainstays for IFA. The close cooperation between them is emphasized by many, not least by themselves. The following statement taken from Gunnar Randers's autobiography illustrates the closeness, trust, and fellowship in relations characterizing such a network (Randers 1975, 177):

I have already found that fate has been kind, or maybe I should say that . . . (the prime minister) . . . has been helpful in placing Jens Christian Hauge in the cabinet position in the defense ministry. Hauge not just wants things to happen quickly, but he also understands things quickly, so that a short audience with him usually leads to an answer. Sometimes he reacts so quickly that the case has not been fully explained, but as long as the answer fits there is no reason to complain. There is no doubt that mainstay number one sits in Storgaten.

The three key actors were not equally active or continuously engaged in support for IFA. Randers had a special position in the first 20 years. He took initiatives, was in the position to develop plans, and was closely tied to the international nuclear research milieu. As chairman of the IFA board, Lied was also a driving force. Hauge played on IFA's team and provided support when it was essential. The decision-making structure around IFA corresponds in many ways to what is often called 'technocratic' (Galbraith

1967), but the core is made up of what we refer to as a clique. IFA was, in other words, a special case of 'closed politics' (Dørfer 1973).

This study does not seek to document in detail how the clique surrounding IFA has exercised its influence. This would be difficult, in part because of the unofficial character that personal alliances and influential relations have. Our point of departure is that such a clique has played a key role as a form of strategic coupling to IFA's political and administrative environment. We focus on the importance of the clique, determining IFA's ability to mobilize resources and to preserve legitimacy.

However, the intention is not only to shed light on IFA's history. The assumption is that this case points to mechanisms of clique influence in closed politics which seem to be stimulated by the properties of a small, homogeneous, and egalitarian political system. We will come back to this in the final section of this article. First we will outline IFA's development.¹

Phase 1: Visions, Formation, and Consolidation, 1949–59

This phase is dominated by the establishment of a new nuclear energy research center. The two members of the IFA clique, Randers and Lied, had belonged to the small circle that played a key role in the establishment of the Defense Research Institute (FFI) in 1946. IFA grew out of this institution. The key person was Randers. He was an early proponent of building a reactor to develop civil applications of nuclear technology. Randers was politically active: he took initiatives, established contacts, and worked out strategies. The third member, Hauge, was the defense minister (1945–52) and the most important supporter when IFA was established in 1949.

Through direct contact with the management of Norsk Hydro, a major electro-chemical company, Randers got access to heavy water. On the basis of proven uranium reserves Randers argued that Norway was also self-sufficient in this respect (Borgeraas 1982, 7–19). Reactor plans were presented to Defense Minister Hauge. 'Some days later Hauge and I drafted the parliamentary proposition at his home' (Randers 1975, 130). The Defense Ministry proposed a grant from the Parliament of five million Norwegian kroner.

In the academic environment there was a great deal of skepticism towards the plans. A mix of military interests and research for peaceful applications was considered unfortunate. Criticism was subdued by the formation of IFA as a free-standing institution. The only fear was that other research areas would suffer, even though the resources involved could not be allocated towards other types of research. Randers managed, however, to

outmanoeuvre the opposition. The Parliament approved the grant without debate (Borgeraas 1982, 9–13).

The entrepreneur phase was concluded by the starting up of the reactor Jeep I in 1951. IFA expanded rapidly in the 1950s, based on public funding (1960, 457 employees). This reflected the Institute's successful mobilization of political and industrial support through the working of the clique. Expansion was tied to two main projects: the construction of a research reactor, and the development of a commercial ship reactor (Borgeraas 1982, 57). IFA's influence gradually became institutionalized through the National Atomic Energy Council and the National Energy Council, where its supportive actors held central positions. The rest of the political community was generally in favor of nuclear research, but few of them were active supporters.

In 1955 IFA proposed the construction of a bigger applied research reactor, and got support from the Parliament. From 1954–55 IFA was also concerned about linking itself with industrial and other commercial interests (i.e. shipping). Norwegian industry and business were potential suppliers of raw materials and buyers of products (isotopes, ship reactors). In the long term, the main concern of the Institute was the construction of an energy-producing reactor. In the first round the ship reactors were regarded as the most promising project, since Norwegian hydropower continued to be inexpensive.

The new IFA reactor turned out to be considerably more expensive than was originally calculated. This resulted in quite strong reactions in political quarters. To escape from this bind, the IFA arranged with the OECD for an international operation of the reactor under IFA's leadership, in 1958. In 1961 a cooperation agreement was reached for a three-year international project (NORA) between Norway, the American Atomic Energy Commission (USAEC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Not only did international cooperation secure professional stimulus and financial resources; it also gave prestige.

In the beginning IFA's role in the central decision-making process was informal and of an *ad hoc* character in cases concerning the Institute. The establishment of the National Atomic Energy Council in 1955, together with the Scandinavian cooperation for the peaceful use of nuclear energy in 1957, created a situation wherein IFA could exercise its influence in organized forms. The National Atomic Energy Council became particularly important, and Randers sat as director from its establishment in 1955 to the end of the 1960s.

The National Atomic Energy Council was established to meet the need for international coordination of regulations. In addition to IFA, representatives came from the Ministry of Industry, together with the Ministries of Justice and of Health and Social Affairs, as well as the FFI.

Gradually, the Atomic Energy Council became the central arena concerning all aspects of nuclear-energy politics. IFA was represented by key persons who played an important part because of their international contacts, which implied that they also had a powerful influence on the interpretation of the international as well as the national situation.

To summarize: The first 10 years of IFA's development was characterized by the ability of 'visionary' entrepreneurs to mobilize political support based on the promises of future prospects for nuclear energy. Prestigious international contacts provided the basis for expansion and consolidation, not only within the Labour Party but within the Parliament as a whole. IFA's influence became institutionalized through the National Atomic Energy Council. The Institute looked upon itself as a driving force in the development of a new advanced industrial sector as well as a pioneering institution in international nuclear-energy research.

Phase 2: IFA under Pressure, 1959–69

Since the establishment of IFA, its leaders had taken the initiative in Norwegian nuclear-research politics. In the 1960s, the situation changed. IFA came under pressure from many directions. International research demonstrated a growing concern about the civil use of nuclear technology. Also, OECD wanted to increase the practical use of R&D activities in member countries. In Norway this move prompted skepticism towards IFA's activities, even among long-time supporters in industry, and it rekindled the opposition in the universities (Borgeraas 1982, 71).

In 1962 the Parliament's Industry Committee requested a full report on technical-scientific research and broader nuclear-energy work. In the last decade, IFA had received approximately 50 percent of the resources granted to the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (NTNF) (see Figure 1). At this time, 75 percent of the Institute's research funds came from the state. The image of IFA being the flagship for Norwegian R&D activity changed as the investigation developed.

Statements were gathered from the National Atomic Energy Board, where Randers was director, and from IFA. Not unexpectedly, the Atomic Energy Bureau was of the opinion that nuclear-energy research should get priority, even at the expense of other forms of high-technology research. However, the report (1964) of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research found the industrial and commercial sectors' attitude concerning nuclear energy problematic. The report was also skeptical towards possible gains from the nuclear ship-reactor project.

The Federation of Norwegian Industries (NI) was given a commission to investigate the involvement of industry with regard to nuclear-energy

generation. The report resulted in a separate Parliamentary report concerning nuclear research. It concluded that major results were, at best, to be long term. Immediate useful industrial applications of the technology were very limited. With Norway's large hydropower resources nuclear power was not on the agenda for some time to come. In any case, it seemed irrational for the nation to undertake a big investment in developing its own nuclear-power plant (Parliamentary Report #22, 1966–67). It would be cheaper to buy the technology abroad if it was needed.

This was the first time that a clearly negative viewpoint concerning nuclear-energy research was given by a group known for its positive relationship with IFA. However, in the first round, the Institute was able to ride out the storm. This was greatly dependent upon the central positions held by IFA supporters in the political and administrative environment. They represented themselves in various positions as neutral experts, while simultaneously negotiating for positive evaluations of Norwegian nuclear research in the international research community.

In addition to his position as director of IFA, Randers was also a member of professional nuclear advisory committees in the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, the National Energy Council, the National Atomic Energy Board, and he was a Norwegian representative in the International Atomic Energy Commission in Vienna. Lied served as the managing director of IFA, beginning in 1960, while simultaneously holding the position of general director of the Defense Research Institute.

From the beginning of the 1960s, Lied played a central part in the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research as a member of the board of directors. In 1966 he became a member of the Central Committee for Norwegian Research. Between 1957 and 1963 he was an advisory member of the SHAPE Technology Center, where he succeeded Hauge, who consistently held a central position both in the Defense Research Council and in the Norwegian defense industry.

The organization of nuclear-reactor research in Norway can be referred to as 'quasi-corporate', since individual politicians and IFA leaders dominated the formal as well as the informal arenas. The Institute's position rested on 'horizontal legitimacy', with support from a small number of elite representatives (Stinchcombe 1968), while it regarded it less important to achieve broader in-depth legitimacy within the political and industrial communities.

The IFA had built its relation to industry and shipping on the promise of rapid development of the new technology. Now the potential users were disappointed. However, the criticism that arose from these quarters during the investigation stood out in sharp contrast to the 'wait and see' attitude of the Parliament (Borgeraas 1982, 96). IFA's base was continually shrinking, but this did not immediately affect the Institute's political position in

any dramatic way. The influence of the IFA clique was strengthened by the fact that business interests were not very active in defining alternative plans for public R&D activity.

IFA's last chance to develop an industrial environment for the Institute concerned a model study of a nuclear power plant in cooperation with the Norsk Hydro company. It would be up to IFA to do the necessary planning and eventually take part in its construction. The Institute also involved representatives from industrial sectors in this project. In 1967, Norway's Electricity & Power Commission – NVE – became involved in the project. In 1969 Norsk Hydro concluded that the project was unprofitable. This decision signified the disappearance of IFA's last supporter within industry. On the other hand, NVE was still on IFA's side.

To summarize: For IFA the 1960s were characterized by receding and retracting support on the one hand, and internal reorientation on the other. However, influential political environments managed to maintain the resource base. Changes in Government did not make any important difference. Trust and confidence between the members of the elite gave room for deadlines to be extended. IFA involved itself heavily in supporting NVE's plans for nuclear power. However, now it was necessary for IFA to settle for the role of consultant because the nation's energy supply was NVE's domain.

Phase 3: Nuclear Energy Protest, Defeat, and Readjustment, 1969–80

Through NVE's nuclear-energy project IFA was drawn into a new political struggle. This struggle developed at about the same time as supporters in and around IFA left the bargaining table. Not only had Randers left IFA in 1968, but the Atomic Energy Board was also dismantled in 1972. However, Lied served simultaneously as the director of IFA's board during the 1970s and as the Minister of Industry in the new Labour Party government (1971–73). The nuclear energy protests of the 1970s occurred alongside the fact that nuclear energy was finally embodied in industry and energy politics (Andersen 1980, 55–56).

As soon as NVE's plans for the first nuclear power plant were finalized there were strong protests from the local communities affected by the plant. The first proposals, which affected several locations in the areas of Oslo fjord, were presented in the fall of 1972. During the next two years, a series of activist groups, community councils, and organizations were drawn into the wave of protests. The opposition had broad support, crossing party lines.

The conflict over the nuclear energy plans revealed a basic weakness

regarding IFA's position in the political-administrative system. Restricted elite consensus can be vulnerable to political mobilization on a large scale. The considerations regarded as decisive by the opposition could not automatically be incorporated into the established elite understanding and official views. In the beginning the protests were ignored. Political support relied on the opinion that nuclear power was not controversial, and that IFA's position was developed and evaluated under relatively closed circumstances. Central actors were not prepared to defend nuclear energy against protests which were based on the interests of local communities, and democratic principles, and they were particularly unprepared to face a local election on the issue.

Party leaders and representatives of the Norwegian Parliament tried to avoid taking a stand on the issue for quite some time. They acknowledged NVE's general mandate, but otherwise kept a low profile. When the conflict became acute, NVE found itself standing alone with IFA. The Parliament was under a great deal of local pressure to end all atomic energy plans. In the Parliamentary Report #45 (1979-80, 204), the Labour Government expressed the opinion that 'it would not be of interest to use nuclear energy in the Norwegian electricity supply system within this century'.

However, the white paper also stated that

until a decision regarding nuclear energy is taken, IFA should maintain the current level of expertise, but that the focus should continually be adjusting to international development, especially Norwegian investigational needs.

IFA was still a significant entry in the national budget, despite incomes from international commissions and cooperative ventures surpassing the public grants (see Figure 1). The Institute was given time to reorganize. In 1980 it was renamed the Institute for Energy Technology.

To summarize: NVE's planning mobilized large sections of the public against nuclear energy, and the politicians shelved plans for building a nuclear power plant. It was decided to reorganize IFA's activities, but at the same time to continue with a steady, although lower, level of engagement in reactor research. Politically IFA had become a 'supertanker' which could not be turned around at short notice. Prestigious key actors could still influence the political evaluation of nuclear energy research, even if they were no longer directly engaged in the network.

So far we have described the operations of a clique in relation to IFA's history. In the last section we will discuss to what extent the case yields general conclusions applicable to small, homogeneous, and egalitarian political systems.

Legitimacy and Autonomy of National Elites

An important feature in the case of IFA is that the historical conditions

are special and the technology complex. Such factors can easily create problems in the political and administrative context. Here we will focus on those sides of IFA's history which can shed light on more general features of elite politics in small and tightly knit political systems.

The existence of cliques, internally based on close personal relations reflecting shared attitudes and generalized trust, is well known. The autonomy of clique members does not, however, primarily rest on control with members of the organizations they lead. In contrast to Michels's (1962) argument, oligarchy may rest on inter-elite relations based on generalized trust. The latter type of arrangement may be more stable and less constrained by the need to control the respective organizations where clique members hold their positions.

The group organized around Colonel North in the Iran-Contras affair seems to have the characteristics of an autonomous clique. However, in this case it is also obvious that such forms of elite organization may be very vulnerable if they are known outside the core network. In this article we have been concerned with how cliques may operate quite openly and with a high degree of legitimacy in relation to other national political elites. We have argued that in small and closely knit political systems the development of autonomous cliques is strengthened by four factors.

(1) *Transparency of the system*: Elites in different areas know of each other, and seem to believe that they have a certain overview which makes it possible to control negative consequences if something goes wrong.

Everyone knows each other, or at least knows of each other. Often, they will meet in various situations. Elites are well aware that others observe them as well. Everyone is sitting in a fish bowl. For these reasons they tend to tolerate each others' mistakes more easily. The next time it might be themselves. Also, evaluations tend to take on a broad and long-term perspective. This mechanism is clearly visible in most controversial political decisions in Norway over the last years.

In such systems there is also a demand for debates on issue rather than discussions of personal responsibilities. It is difficult to share the blame for earlier decisions. Criticism should be constructive and preferably occur in private. Similar characteristics can be found in the nuclear debate in Sweden. This pattern is also characteristic of a number of decisions on state-owned industry over the last years where the Norwegian state has lost billions due to bad judgement. Personal criticisms have been mild, and public debate reflected the general elite interest of avoiding that anyone in particular be blamed.

(2) *National scarcity of qualified persons*: There has to be a division of tasks, based on trust and respect for each others turfs.

It is a common characteristic of small political systems to have few

competent people in each area, and this was particularly obvious in the case of IFA. As IFA demonstrates, this results in limitations as to who can appear as the 'qualified interpreter'. It is not up to everyone to make the information relevant and put it on the current agenda, possibly in a new form. If the information is not channelled and presented in the right form, it will be ignored.

This kind of political segmentation is also reflected in the fact that Norwegian officials may be curbed in their statements on controversial issues within the country, but they are free to publish their views abroad. The latter action is not regarded as being dangerous, because to some degree 'import' of arguments and views can be regulated. We recognize this mechanism in the fact that the Swedish debate about nuclear energy, which took place at the same time, did not receive any attention in the parliamentary discussion of nuclear research in Norway. IFA's supporting actors ruled the ground by being 'qualified interpreters' of both the Institute's activities and nuclear-related incidents in other countries.

(3) *Consensus on national goals*: Mutual trust is coupled with cooperative attitudes. There is a lack of adversary roles.

Stability and lack of conflict were characteristics of nuclear energy research on the elite level. It illustrates a general trend in small political systems. Torgersen (1974) has claimed that the Norwegian system can be characterized by 'single-track solutions'. This normally involves a thorough discussion of political questions to establish consensus. Later the decisions which have been made are nearly impossible to challenge.

However, in the IFA case consensus was only implicit. It reflects shared norms among elites, norms which are also widely held in the population. On the other hand, however, it is not clear what such norms imply. Constituencies delegate to elites, and among elites there is a division of labor. Such a system creates room for cliques with ambitions and a strong sense of mission to plan national development.

(4) *Elites need to protect themselves from judgements based on strong egalitarian norms*: Egalitarian attitudes imply that elites should also be measured against ideal norms. Elites have a common interest in shielding their activities from the wider public.

In some countries political life has two lanes, one for elites and one for the general public. This implies that elites should be judged by other standards. They have a certain autonomy from moral principles which may be hard to combine with political pragmatism. In France, it seems being a womanizer may still be an activum for politicians. In the US, general norms of morality seem mostly to be applicable only to the private life of politicians.

In some small countries, however, no distinction is made between elites and the general public. Elites are judged at least as strictly as others.

Needless to say, elites will have a common interest in shielding their activities from the judgement of the general public. Part of the bargain is that elites are tolerant towards each other; the next time it may be themselves. They want to be judged on the basis of the results they produce, rather than on adherence to ideal norms.

The four factors discussed, strengthening the legitimacy and autonomy of particular elites in relation to other elites and the general public, seem conducive to the formation of cliques, and an important factor is the lack of aggressive elite competition. In pluralistic systems the legitimization is tied to competition between elite groups (Dahl 1967). In many small political systems, however, such competition is of limited importance within the political and administrative realm. Instead, we find strong norms for reciprocity and sharing of responsibility. Admissions of error have little effect on political drama. This is opposed to the conditions in larger political systems, where only general principles, such as freedom and democracy, hold it together. The leaders are competitors who try to displace each other, to their own and to their follower's advantage (cf. the American spoils system).

In Norway, political terminology lacks the concept of the adversarial process which has a very central place in liberal political systems, especially in the United States. Elite tolerance for each other appears to rest on two presumptions. The first is a strong belief that, after all, parties and political systems have a limited ability to make rational decisions. Second, there is the idea that the political system is as good as it can be, and manned by competent and honest people. There is no place for an easy evaluation of the past.

However, as pointed out, the strength of such factors is viewed as related to small political systems. This does not, however, imply that conditions conducive to the formation of autonomous cliques are equally strong in all small countries. However, to the degree that cliques emerge, these kinds of arrangements have important implications for (1) political entrepreneurship, (2) organizational development, and (3) legitimacy:

- (1) The clique members have considerable freedom to establish and push forward a new idea which they personally believe in. They have not only access to resources, but also face few barriers in converting between economic, administrative, and political spheres.
- (2) Normally, the structure of an organization will reflect the complexity of the environment. The IFA case shows, in contrast, that when the external dimension is privatized by a resourceful clique, then organizational structure may remain loosely coupled to the technological and economic demands of the environment. The example also demonstrates

that two structures – network and organization – each quite simple, together can handle considerable complexity in the environment.

- (3) In small political systems communality and reciprocity in a clique may have support within major parts of national elite groups. This is particularly the case when the clique represents a national center of competence with international approval, while the members have an influential position so that nobody wants to challenge them. The result is loss of accountability and democratic control.

To summarize: Oligarchic tendencies have traditionally been discussed in relation to internal organizational conflict over control, leaving leaders with few resources to pursue other goals outside the organization. However, as our example demonstrates, elite autonomy may have a safer and more stable basis if it rests on inter-elite support. This kind of autonomy may be particularly strong when elites are organized as a clique.

NOTE

1. This article is based on, and supplements, empirical material from the Energy and Society Project at the Institute of Sociology, University of Oslo, 1979–82. The general description of IFA's development until the mid-1960s is based on two reports: 'Aspects of Energy Research: Big Technology and Small Nations' (Borgeraas and Albrechtsen 1981) and 'Forskning og forskningsplanlegging' (Borgeraas 1982). The description of the last stage of IFA's development builds on the magister dissertation 'Styring og protest: Kjernekraftprotest i Norge 1972–75' (Andersen 1980). The material on key persons and their positions in the Norwegian political and administrative system has been collected for this article. Erling Albrechtsen, Maja Arnestad, and Ulf Torgersen have contributed through constructive and critical comments.

REFERENCES

- Albrechtsen, E. H. 1975. 'Om eierforhold i store konserner'. *Sosialistisk årbok*. Oslo: Pax.
- Albrechtsen, E. H. & Borgeraas, E. 1981. 'Aspects of Energy Research: "Big Technology", and Small Nations'. Paper presented at the Conference 'Social Impacts of Energy Production and Use', Dubrovnik, September 1981.
- Andersen, S. S. 1980. 'Styring og protest. En studie av kjernekraftprotest i Norge 1972–75'. Magistergradsavhandling i sosiologi. Oslo University.
- Borgeraas, E. 1982. 'Forskning og forskningsplanlegging'. Arbeidsnotat, Institutt for sosiologi, Oslo University.
- Cyert, R. M. & March, J. 1963. *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Dahl, R. 1961. *Who Governs?* New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dahl, R. 1967. *Moderne politisk analyse*. Oslo: Cappelen.
- Dørfer, I. 1973. *System 37 Viggen*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Egeberg, Olson og Sætren. 'Organisasjonssamfunnet og den segmenterte', *Kirke og kultur*, nos. 4 & 5.
- Field, G. L., Highley, J. & Burton, G. M. 1988. 'The Promise of Elite Theory'. Paper prepared for the Workshop 'Theoretical Analysis and Empirical Research in the Study of Political Elites', European Consortium for Political Research April 5–10, Rimini, Italy, 1988.

that two structures – network and organization – each quite simple, together can handle considerable complexity in the environment.

- (3) In small political systems communality and reciprocity in a clique may have support within major parts of national elite groups. This is particularly the case when the clique represents a national center of competence with international approval, while the members have an influential position so that nobody wants to challenge them. The result is loss of accountability and democratic control.

To summarize: Oligarchic tendencies have traditionally been discussed in relation to internal organizational conflict over control, leaving leaders with few resources to pursue other goals outside the organization. However, as our example demonstrates, elite autonomy may have a safer and more stable basis if it rests on inter-elite support. This kind of autonomy may be particularly strong when elites are organized as a clique.

NOTE

1. This article is based on, and supplements, empirical material from the Energy and Society Project at the Institute of Sociology, University of Oslo, 1979–82. The general description of IFA's development until the mid-1960s is based on two reports: 'Aspects of Energy Research: Big Technology and Small Nations' (Borgeraas and Albrechtsen 1981) and 'Forskning og forskningsplanlegging' (Borgeraas 1982). The description of the last stage of IFA's development builds on the magister dissertation 'Styring og protest: Kjernekraftprotest i Norge 1972–75' (Andersen 1980). The material on key persons and their positions in the Norwegian political and administrative system has been collected for this article. Erling Albrechtsen, Maja Arnestad, and Ulf Torgersen have contributed through constructive and critical comments.

REFERENCES

- Albrechtsen, E. H. 1975. 'Om eierforhold i store konserner'. *Sosialistisk årbok*. Oslo: Pax.
- Albrechtsen, E. H. & Borgeraas, E. 1981. 'Aspects of Energy Research: "Big Technology", and Small Nations'. Paper presented at the Conference 'Social Impacts of Energy Production and Use', Dubrovnik, September 1981.
- Andersen, S. S. 1980. 'Styring og protest. En studie av kjernekraftprotest i Norge 1972–75'. Magistergradsavhandling i sosiologi. Oslo University.
- Borgeraas, E. 1982. 'Forskning og forskningsplanlegging'. Arbeidsnotat, Institutt for sosiologi, Oslo University.
- Cyert, R. M. & March, J. 1963. *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Dahl, R. 1961. *Who Governs?* New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dahl, R. 1967. *Moderne politisk analyse*. Oslo: Cappelen.
- Dørfer, I. 1973. *System 37 Viggen*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Egeberg, Olson og Sætren. 'Organisasjonssamfunnet og den segmenterte', *Kirke og kultur*, nos. 4 & 5.
- Field, G. L., Highley, J. & Burton, G. M. 1988. 'The Promise of Elite Theory'. Paper prepared for the Workshop 'Theoretical Analysis and Empirical Research in the Study of Political Elites', European Consortium for Political Research April 5–10, Rimini, Italy, 1988.

- Hernes, G. 1978. *Forhandlingsøkonomi og blandingsadministrasjon* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Knoke, D. & Kuklinski, J. 1982. *Network Analysis*. Sage.
- Lipset, S. M. 1960. *Political Man*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Michels, R. 1962. *Political Parties*. New York: Free Press.
- Mills, C. W. 1956. *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Moren, J. (ed.) 1979. *Den kollegiale forvaltning*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Olsen J. P. 1978. *Politisk organisering*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Olsen J. P. 1982. *Organized Democracy*. Oslo: University Press.
- Palmer, D. 'Broken Ties: Interlocking Directorates and Interlocking Coordination' *ASQ*, March.
- Pfeffer, J. & Salancik, G. 1978. *The External Control of Organizations*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Randers, G. 1975. *Lysår*. Oslo: Tiden.
- Røed-Larsen, T. 1977. 'Politikkens maskerade', *Kontrast*.
- Seip, J. A. 1963. *Fra embetsmannsstat til ettpartistat*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Stinchcombe, A. 1968. *Constructing Social Theories*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc.
- Torgersen, U. 1979. 'Norwegian Political Institutions', in Ramsøy, N. R., ed., *Norwegian Society*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Torgersen, U. et al. 1977. 'Kringkastingen i Norge 1920–40', *Historisk Tidsskrift* 56, 53–79.
- Useem, M. 1980. 'Corporations and the Corporate Elite', *Annual Review of Sociology* 6.
- Valen, H. 1969. *Political Parties in Norway*. Oslo: The University Press.