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From Class Party to Catchall Party?: The Adaptation of the Finnish Agrarian-Center Party

David Arter*

This article seeks to apply Kirchheimer's 'catchall party thesis' to the transformation of the Agrarian-Center Party in Finland. On at least two counts this might seem a hopeless endeavor. First, Kirchheimer excluded most parties in the smaller West European democracies like Finland from his analysis on the curious grounds that they either had effective majorities or regular access to power and, therefore, had no need of catchall strategies. Second, he expressly excluded certain parties, including significantly Agrarian parties, from his purview because they were too narrowly based to become catchall parties. Kirchheimer also asserts that in general only major parties could successfully achieve a 'life-saving transformation.' The Finnish Agrarian Party was certainly that. In the early 1960s, it was the largest single party, with a substantial *classe gardée*, and was also *the* pivotal party of governing coalitions. Accordingly, this article addresses three interrelated questions: a) Why did the Finnish Agrarians seek catchall status? b) What were the catchall strategies they pursued? c) Has an archetypal mass-class party, contrary to Kirchheimer's submission, been able to extend the basis of its support to become a catchall party? It is argued that although the Center Party today exhibits the electoral attributes of the catchall party – and is the only Finnish party really to do so – it lacks the organizational characteristics of the *genre* as enumerated by Kirchheimer.

Introduction

In his groundbreaking work on the catchall 'people's' party in the mid-1960s, Kirchheimer made it clear that, because of their defense of a specific clientele, agrarian parties could not become catchall parties.

> Neither a small, strictly regional party such as the South Tyrolean People's party nor a party built around the espousal of harsh and limited ideological claims, like the Dutch Calvinists; or transitory group claims, such as the German refugees; or a specific professional category's claims, such as the Swedish Agrarians; or a limited action program, such as the Danish single-tax Justice Party, can aspire to a catch-all performance (Kirchheimer 1990, 55)

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But could agrarian parties redesignated as center parties specifically to broaden their electoral appeal be expected to do any better? As a rule, Kirchheimer notes, only major parties can become successful catchall parties (ibid.) and the Finnish Agrarians were the largest single parliamentary party with 23.0 percent of the vote when they changed their name to Center Party in 1965.

Although the literature on *party system change* and indeed *party change* abounds with references to it, the notion of the catchall party is extremely difficult to operationalize and therefore test. What, exactly, does a catchall party look like? Clearly, it is not enough to define it as simply a party with a heterogeneous support base (Wolinetz 1979, 5). Rather, it is necessary to examine the extent of changes in a party's electoral support, the constraints on extending beyond its 'core constituency' or *classe gardée* and the strategies designed to achieve this end. Even then, it is difficult to establish that, incontrovertibly, the pursuit of particular strategies has led to particular outcomes. As Mair has observed: 'Strict criteria concerning what constitutes a "catchall party" or a "mass party" are not easily conceived' (Mair 1989, 258), and testing the model is fraught with problems. In any event, Kirchheimer argues that parties with very specific group or regional claims are too narrowly based to achieve a 'life-saving transformation' (Kirchheimer 1990, 55).

Recent work on the electoral adaptation of Scandinavian farmers' parties has focused on Iceland, Norway and Sweden (Kristinsson 1991) and, curiously, there has been little or no mention of the Finnish case (Christensen 1997, 391–407). As the example of the West German Social Democrats' Bad Godesberg program in 1959 appears to illustrate, however, it might reasonably be hypothesized that catchall strategies are particularly attractive to parties at times of electoral decline and/or periods of extended political opposition. Thus, the Swedish Agrarians changed their name having plummeted to an electoral nadir of 9.4 percent in 1956. Yet the Finnish Agrarian Party (*maalaisliitto*) was the largest single party in 1962 and there appeared no *prima facie* reason to engage in catchall strategies. Against this backdrop, the present study tackles three interlinked questions: a) Why did the Finnish Agrarians adopt catchall tactics in the early 1960s? b) What were the catchall strategies they pursued? c) Has an archetypal mass-class or single-interest party, contrary to Kirchheimer's thrust, been able both to diversify its support base and refashion its organization in line with the 'catchall model'?

The Finnish case study is in five sections. In order to appreciate the scale of the task confronting the party in extending its electoral constituency beyond its core farm support, the first part examines the historical strength and class base of the Finnish Agrarians in a comparative Nordic perspective. The second analyzes the socio-economic changes (exponential

industrialization and urbanization) underpinning the case for electoral adaptation and the redesignation of the party in 1965. The third part constitutes a brief note on the electoral and governmental record of the modernizing party from its change of name to the present. Fourth, there is an application to the Finnish Agrarian-Center Party of the catchall strategies enumerated by Kirchheimer. Finally, there is a more detailed consideration of the extent to which the Agrarian-Center Party has broadened its voter base to become a catchall party.

It is argued that the Finnish Agrarian-Center possesses the most heterogeneous support of all the Finnish parties. It is the only party with substantial backing among the Finnish-speaking farmers and the only party with levels of support significantly above its national average in the 'other Finland' – that is, the relatively sparsely populated regions outside the southern third of the country. In its traditional core areas in northern and eastern Finland in particular the Center Party *is* a catchall party with roughly equal amounts of support from farmers, blue-collar and white-collar workers. Equally, whilst a catchall party in the breadth of its support, the Agrarian-Center has lacked the primary structural characteristics of a catchall party as defined by Kirchheimer and remains a mass political organization.

The Historic Strength and Class Base of the Finnish Agrarians

It was not so much the emergence of farm-specific parties in the Nordic region that was distinctive – peasant parties arose across central and eastern Europe in the period before and after the first world war – as the fact that they persisted until the late 1950s in Sweden and Norway and to 1965 in Finland. In Finland, moreover, when the Agrarian Party followed its Swedish and Norwegian sister parties and changed its name to Center Party, it was not only the largest single party but also the leading party of government and had been the 'hinge group' in coalition building since the first years of independence.

The Finnish Agrarian Party was formed in 1906 largely out of breakaway elements from the two nineteenth-century nationalist parties, the Old Finns and Young Finns (Hakalehto 1986, 61–194). At 66 percent in 1910, the proportion of the economically active population engaged in agriculture was higher than in Norway and Sweden. However, far more pertinent for the emergence of the Finnish Agrarians were the concentrations of independent family-sized farms in the north-west (Oulu and Vaasa) and south-east (Karelia) of the country. It may be, as Hokkanen has argued, that the embryonic Agrarian Party was *in principle* a party of the whole

Table 1. The Average Agrarian Poll in Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish General Elections, 1919–62. Percent

Country	Best Poll	Period Average
Norway	15.9 (1930)	11.3
Sweden	14.3 (1936)	12.2
Finland	27.3 (1930)	22.9

countryside and not narrowly a farm producers' party (Hokkanen 1998, 4). But in practice, the Finnish party's vote derived from the independent small farming population. Indeed, in recruiting support almost exclusively from the stratum of independent farmers, the Nordic Agrarian parties were more evidently class parties than their more celebrated social democratic-labor counterparts. In the Finnish case, 'class agrarianism' took deep root in the party during the 1920s and 1930s, whilst in the aftermath of two losing wars against the Soviet Union between 1939–44 there was a further deepening of the divide between (agricultural) producers and (urban) consumers (Hokkanen 1996, 379). In 1948, 81 percent of the Agrarians' support derived from farmers (Sänkiaho 1991, 31).

A broad picture of the significantly greater electoral strength of the Finnish Agrarian Party compared with its Norwegian and Swedish counterparts can be gained from Table 1. In the ten *Storting* elections between 1921 and the party's change of name in 1959, the Norwegian Agrarians polled an average of 11.3 percent, marginally the weakest of the three farm-specific parties. The Swedish party's profile was not significantly different. In the eleven elections to the *Riksdag*'s second chamber between 1920 and the adoption of the title Center Party in 1957, the Swedish Agrarians averaged 12.2 percent of the poll. The average poll of the Finnish Agrarians in contrast was more than double that of the Norwegian party and nearly double that of the Swedish Agrarians. In the fifteen *Eduskunta* elections between 1919–62, the Finnish Agrarians averaged 22.9 percent of the vote and they obtained 27.3 percent in 1930. Excluding the first post-independence general election in 1919, the Finnish Agrarians' vote did not fall below one fifth of the total poll.

In seeking to understand the greater electoral strength and all-round 'relevance' of agrarianism in Finland – in Sartori's sense of eligibility for government – five main points need emphasis.

a) The Finnish Agrarians' central role in the completion of state building between 1917–1919 (the independent farmers fought on the victorious White side during the 1918 civil war) and in promoting a republican constitution for the new successor state (Arter 1978, 91–123.

b) The party's promotion of a land reform program in the 1920s which

was designed as a measure of social engineering and, in providing independent holdings for the rural proletariat of crofters and farm laborers, strengthened the Agrarians' core class of supporters.

c) A vigorous resettlement program in the late 1940s for refugees from that part of Karelia conceded to the Soviet Union, which served to reinforce the size of the family-sized farm population at a time of accelerated industrialization. Importantly, agrarianism was imported into, and in turn consolidated the party's support base in southern Finland as a result of the resettlement of the Karelian population.

d) The role of the long-serving (and former Agrarian) president Urho Kekkonen (1956–81) in maintaining the Agrarians in office and the concomitant special relationship that developed between the Agrarians and the Kremlin (Arter 1981, 219–34). With several other parties, *inter alia* the Social Democrats and Conservatives suspect in foreign policy terms, the Agrarians could argue that they, above all others, were the party that acted in the national interest.

e) Divisions in the Social Democrats in the late 1950s which kept them out of power for a decade and made the Agrarians and not the Social Democrats the natural governing party until 1966.

The Agrarians' Change of Name

On the eve of Finnish independence in 1917, agriculture employed almost five times as many persons as industry, whilst in 1930 the proportion of the economically active population engaged in agriculture was exceeded in only five European countries – Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania and Poland (Arter 1979, 110). Following the second world war, however, there was a sharp decline in the size of the population engaged in agriculture and forestry. A large indemnity, repayable to Russia mainly in heavy machinery, stimulated industrialization, and the loss of substantial areas of Karelia led many emigrants, despite the resettlement program, to take jobs in the towns. By 1960, the numbers employed in agriculture and forestry had fallen to little over one third of the total labor force, and it was only one fifth in 1970 (see Table 2). Particularly marked was the post-war increase in the numbers working in commerce and the service industries. Crucially, the movement away from the land was not an even process and rural depopulation affected precisely those peripheral regions where the Agrarians had traditionally been strongest.

Nonetheless, the barrier to party modernization – programmatic renewal and/or a change of name – was the existence of a strong class (peasant) consciousness in the party. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, there was deep-seated grassroots' resistance to deputy chairman Johannes Virolainen's

Table 2. The Economically Active Finnish Population by Industry, 1950–1970

Industry	Year		
	1950	1960	1970
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	45.9	35.5	20.1
Industry	21.5	22.8	25.7
Construction	6.3	8.7	8.3
Commerce	9.2	13.2	18.8
Transport/communications	5.4	6.3	7.1
Services	10.3	13.2	18.0
Unknown	1.4	0.3	2.0

concern to broaden the base of the party so as to include all those living and working in the countryside. Virolainen recognized the realities of rapid industrialization – which he contended should be decentralized and dispersed throughout rural Finland – and the need to respond to it. The likes of veteran Karelian and former minister, Juho Niukkanen, however, gave forceful expression to the suspicion felt by the rank-and-file members towards the educated 'gentlemen' at the party's helm and in general to the so-called 'asphalt agrarians', that is, those politicians who were not farmers (Hokkanen 1996, 386). In addition to Virolainen, these included V. J. Sukselainen, the party chairman between 1945–64 and Urho Kekkonen, who was prime minister on five occasions between 1950–55 and thereafter served as president for a quarter of a century. Consequently, at the Lappeenranta party conference in June 1950, Virolainen's proposal to include reference in the program to the Agrarian Party as a center party was given short shrift (Virolainen 1969, 428).

Two factors in the late 1950s allowed the broad issue of modernization back onto the party agenda. There was the Swedish Agrarians' change of name and subsequent electoral gains and the post-mortem which followed the Finnish party's election defeat in 1958. In August that year, Virolainen wrote an article in the youth organ *Kyntäjä* in which he alluded to *Venstre* in Denmark as a model of how an agricultural and rural party could develop into a nationally based party (Virolainen 1958, 28–29). He also delegated to the Youth Section the responsibility for promoting a debate about the party's ideology. Over the autumn-winter 1959–60, moreover, Virolainen wrote a series of fifteen articles analyzing the party's leading principles and this provided the initiative for an internal discussion which led to the adoption of a new party program in Kemi in 1962. For the first time this was split into a section on 'Principles' and another on 'Practical Policies.' Before that, in February 1961, prime minister Sukselainen's political secretary, Kalervo Siikala, in an article in the newspaper *Maakansa*,

proposed that the party's designation be changed to 'Agrarian Party-Center Party' (Keränen 1984, 86).

Virolainen's displacement of the long-serving Sukselainen as the new chairman at the party conference in Kouvola in June 1964 (almost certainly with the connivance of president Kekkonen) expedited the change of name. Virolainen used two main arguments in its favor. First, he emphasized the way Finnish society was no longer the class society it had been – in which political alignments reflected occupational divisions – and urged the need to recognize the increase in social and geographical mobility (Virolainen 1969, 430–31). Second, he urged the need to think to the middle term so as to meet the socialist threat and by extension protect the agricultural interest. As if to underline his point, Virolainen noted that the fraternal parties in Sweden and Norway had changed their names and that in Norway a Center-led non-socialist coalition under Per Borten had recently assumed the reins of power.

At an extraordinary party conference in Kuopio on October 17, 1965, the chairman of the Varsinais-Suomi organization, Einari Karvetti, condemned the unseemly haste in jettisoning the old name and argued that a small Agrarian Party would be better equipped to make its voice heard than a large and disparate Center Party. He concluded that: 'In twenty or thirty years time, there will be nothing left of the Agrarians' ideological foundation' (*Suomenmaa* 18.10.1965). Similar sentiments, incidentally, were expressed on the eve of the Swedish Agrarians' change of name by, among others, the long-serving parliamentarian, Alex Rubbestad (Jonnergård 1985, 20). In the same traditionalist class conscious vein, Pekka Nuutinen from North Savo commented derisively that: 'If somebody with a Beatles haircut seeks to represent the peasant's interests, then all is lost'! Some media interest was aroused by the fact that Sukselainen, clearly not wishing to end up on the losing side again, absented himself from the Kuopio conference (*Helsingin Sanomat* 19.10.1965). But, as Virolainen noted, the only real surprise was that the change of name was ultimately carried so overwhelmingly by 1036–137 votes (*Suomenmaa* 18.11.1965).

The Electoral and Governmental Record of the Finnish Center Party

It is not possible in a short article to trace in any detail the electoral and governmental performance of the Center Party from its change of name to the present. The salient points nonetheless warrant emphasis.

a) The adoption of catchall strategies, including a new name and new program in the early 1960s, did not yield an instant electoral return; rather, the first decade after its change of name witnessed a sharp decline in the

party's support. In 1970, the Center Party lost its status as the largest non-socialist party and recorded its worst result since before the achievement of independence in December 1917. Throughout the period 1970–1991, moreover, the Center played second electoral fiddle to the Conservatives (*Kokoomus*). In the six general elections between 1970–87, the Center Party polled 17.3 percent compared with 20.2 percent for the Conservatives.

b) Following the dramatic rise of the populist Finnish Rural Party, led by Veikko Vennamo, the Center's vote dropped to a nadir of 16.4 percent in 1972. The Center Party had participated in a so-called 'Popular Front' coalition under the Social Democrat, Rafael Paasio, which also included the Communists, between 1966–1970. However, its association with measures to rationalize agricultural production, along with the structure of farmholdings, which heightened rural discontent and quickened the pace of emigration to southern Finland and Sweden, played into the hands of former Agrarian, Vennamo. As a reaction to Vennamo, the Center Party shifted to the right and there were even plans to replace Virolainen with the rightist-inclined Nestori Kaasaiainen (Suomi 1996, 376–80). The ranks were deeply divided, a left-wing faction called Group 70 (*Ryhmä 70*) insinuating that to meet the Vennamo challenge, Virolainen had turned his back on internal party debate, abandoned an immediate concern to broaden the party's electoral base and taken the party back to its rural roots.

c) Since 1975, the Center Party's support has not declined, despite the rapid fall in the numbers engaged in the primary sector; rather, it stabilized its vote at 16–17 percent in the late 1970s and 1980s. In 1990, the size of the economically active population engaged in agriculture and forestry was 9.0 percent (see Table 3) whereas at the 1991 general election the Center Party gained 24.8 percent of the poll.

Table 3. The Economically Active Population by Occupation in 1990

Occupation	Percent
Technical, natural and social science, humanistic and artistic work	24.0
Administrative, managerial and clerical work	14.5
Sales work	8.5
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	9.0
Mining and quarrying	0.2
Transport, communications	6.5
Industrial production work	22.6
Services	12.3
Military work	0.5
Unknown	2.1

Source: Suomen tilastollinen vuosikirja 1995, p. 337.

d) The 1983 general election in many ways marked a turning point in the history of the redesignated party, although the Center Party's vote at 17.6 percent rose by only 0.3 percent compared with four years earlier. It was the first general election since the retirement through ill health of the long-serving president Kekkonen, and the modest gains were achieved in apparently adverse circumstances. There had been deep internal division about the party's nomination for the January 1982 presidential election and the Center candidate Virolainen gained only 16.8 percent following a lack-luster campaign. In 1983, moreover, the Social Democrats, who advanced by 2.8 percent, were able to profit from a 'Koivisto effect', since Mauno Koivisto had been elected the first Social Democratic president by an overwhelming margin the previous year. The Conservatives (up 0.4 percent) continued to profit electorally from being in an 'offside position,' i.e., ineligible for government for so-called 'general reasons' (suspicion in Moscow). Finally, there was also a 'second coming' for the Rural Party which polled 9.7 percent under the leadership of Veikko Vennamo's son, Pekka. However, having persuaded the Liberal People's Party to merge with it, the Center Party not only held its ground, but elected its first MP in Helsinki.

Notably too, the advent of Paavo Väyrynen, who had replaced Virolainen as party chairman three years earlier, signified an important change in the Center's governmental strategy in 1983. This entailed challenging the leading coalition party, the Social Democrats, with a view to breaking free from the Center's perceived role under Virolainen of the Social Democrats' willing assistant (critics would say 'partner in crime'). This was to be achieved by engaging the majority of non-socialist ministers – representing the Center, Finnish Rural and Swedish People's Parties – in common action designed to upstage the Social Democrats and their prime minister, Kalevi Sorsa.

Finally, 1983 was significant for the Center Party because the incorporation of a divided Rural Party into government – opposed by Veikko Vennamo – meant that the party lost much of its radicalism and protest character in the eyes of voters. Indeed, this was the beginning of a process which saw the Center Party claim an increasing proportion of the farm vote.

e) The psychological importance for the Center Party of the 1988 presidential election cannot be understated. Although Koivisto was comfortably reelected, the Conservative prime minister, Harri Holkeri was beaten into third place by Väyrynen, and this meant that for the first time since 1970 the Center became the largest non-socialist party. Interestingly, Väyrynen had been favored by Kekkonen as the Center Party's future presidential candidate as early as 1977 (when he was appointed foreign secretary), and it is clear that the aging president had wanted to jump over a

Table 4. The Center Party's Performance in General Elections 1966–95. Percent

Party	SDP	Con	Center	LA	FRP	SPP	FCL	Libs	Greens	Others
1966	27.2	13.8	21.2	21.2	1.0	6.0	0.5	6.5	–	2.6
1970	23.4	18.0	17.1	16.6	10.5	5.7	1.1	6.0	–	1.6
1972	25.8	17.6	16.4	17.0	9.2	5.3	2.5	5.2	–	1.0
1975	24.9	18.4	17.6	18.9	3.6	5.0	3.3	4.3	–	4.0
1979	23.9	21.7	17.3	17.9	4.6	4.3	4.8	3.7	–	1.8
1983	26.7	22.1	17.6	13.5	9.7	4.9	3.0	•	–	2.5
1987	24.1	23.1	17.6	9.4	6.3	5.6	2.6	1.0	4.0	6.3
1991	22.1	19.3	24.8	10.1	4.8	5.5	3.1	0.8	6.8	2.7
1995	28.3	17.9	19.8	11.2	1.3	5.1	3.0	0.6	6.5	6.3

Notes: The Liberal People's Party ran as a subsection of the Center Party, but later reclaimed its independence. The 1987 vote for Leftist Alliance (LA) or its predecessor, the Finnish People's Democratic League, excludes the vote for the breakaway Democratic Alternative (DEVA).
SDP = Social Democrats; Con = Conservatives; LA = Leftist Alliance; FRP = Finnish Rural Party; SPP = Swedish People's Party; FCL = Finnish Christian League; Libs = Liberal People's Party.
Source: Kansanedustajainvaalit 1995, p. 14.

generation in his former party (that is, over Virolainen and Karjalainen) when he stood down (Aho 1998, 245). Väyrynen's strong presidential election performance enabled the Center finally to move out of Kekkonen's shadow.

f) The massive growth in the size of the salaried employment sector in the 1980s – associated with so-called post-industrialization and the communications revolution – blurred the old class contours of politics and created real potential for the Center Party to make inroads into the new middle class. In 1991, the Center Party achieved its best-ever result of 24.8 percent (see Table 4). It became the largest single party overall, the largest single party in no less than eight of the fourteen mainland constituencies (that is, excluding the single-member Åland islands) and in Lapland claimed an absolute majority of the vote.

g) In 1995, the Center suffered the unpopularity associated with governing through the worst economic recession in Finland's history and saw its vote fall nearly 125,000 on four years earlier. Nonetheless, it maintained its strength in the less populated, agriculture-dominant areas of central and northern Finland and remained the leading party in the constituencies of Lapland, Vaasa, Oulu and Kuopio (Kansanedustajain vaalit 1995, 15).

h) Between 1966–87, the Center Party participated regularly in governing coalitions with one or more parties of the left, principally the Social Democrats. It entered opposition in 1987, returned to lead a non-socialist coalition (the first for a quarter of a century) in 1991, only to slip back into opposition in 1995. Crucially, it was a Center-led coalition that in 1992

applied for and presided over Finnish entry into the European Union on January 1, 1995.

i) Out of the nineteen governing combinations with parliamentary backing (or tolerance) since 1966, the Center Party has participated in fifteen or 79 percent compared with sixteen or 84 percent for the Social Democrats (see Table 5). In terms of *governing time*, the Center has participated in governments for twenty-six of the thirty-three years – nearly 79 percent – since its change of name, whereas the figure for the Social Democrats in the same period is 27 or 82 percent. The main difference between the two parties in governmental terms has been in the length of tenure of the premiership. The Center has claimed the prime minister's post on six occasions – Karjalainen 1970–71; Miettunen 1975–76; and Aho 1991–95 – making up a total of eight years between 1966–98, whereas the Social Democrats have boasted the prime minister's post on eleven occasions comprising a total of twenty years. In short, over the last thirty-two years, the Social Democrats have held the premiership for two and a half times longer than the Center Party.

The Catchall Strategies of the Agrarian-Center Party

In his seminal work, Kirchheimer identifies five main catchall strategies (Kirchheimer 1990, 58–59):

1. Drastically reducing the party's ideological baggage in favor of short-term tactical electoral considerations. In the words of Katz and Mair: 'In place of the defensive electoral strategy of the mass party which laid primary stress on mobilization and retention of a limited constituency, the party adopts an offensive strategy exchanging effectiveness in depth for a wider audience and more immediate electoral success' (Mair 1997, 102).

2. Consolidating the powers and position of a nationally oriented leadership embodying national rather than sectional goals. Leaders are no longer primarily accountable to the members, but rather to the wider electorate.

3. Downgrading the role of individual party members so as not to detract from the projection of the desired catchall image. In Katz and Mair's terms, members are *cheerleaders* and the pattern of authority is more top-down than bottom-up (Mair 1997, 113).

4. De-emphasizing the *classe gardée* in favor of catching a wide spectrum of voters in its electoral net.

5. Securing access to a wide variety of interest groups, partly for funding reasons, but primarily to secure increased electoral support via interest group intercession.

Kirchheimer's formulation focuses on the strategic reorientation of

prospective catchall parties in four distinctive arenas: the ideological arena and the role of ideology in institutional adaptation; the organizational arena and the leader-member relationship; the electoral-parliamentary arena and the search for new voters; and the corporate arena with the focus on party-group linkages. How relevant were these catchall strategies to the case of the Finnish Agrarian-Center Party? Let us take the five points briefly in turn.

Far from dumping excess ideological baggage, agrarianism in Finland involved in practice the narrow promotion of class interests and, ideologically, the Agrarians traveled light. As noted, however, the new party program, adopted in Kemi in 1962, was for the first time divided into sections on 'principles' and 'practical policies' and from the early 1960s the Agrarians sought to project (not jettison) a distinctive centrist ideology. The party was presented as charting a middle way – a central course – between socialism and large-scale capitalism, and the promotion of a catch-all ideology was designed to legitimize its concern to embrace a broader base of interests. Contrary to Kirchheimer in short ideology was not sacrificed on the altar of short-term electoral considerations; rather, it was intended to inform and validate the wider policy appeal of the modernizing party. The detailed set of 'Aims for the Sixties' reflected the new policy orientation in the party. Reference was made to the need for such things as a national economic plan based on the efficient use of resources in the various regions, the development of manufacturing industry in the underdeveloped north and east (i.e., small-scale rural industry) and the realization of industrial democracy at all levels.

Kirchheimer has noted that: 'National societal goals transcending group interests offer the best sales prospect for the party intent on establishing or enlarging an appeal previously limited to specific sections of the population' (Kirchheimer 1990, 54). In the case of the Center Party such national goals have included emphasis on the democratization of society, including the desirability of the decentralization of decision making; promoting the market economy with a human face, i.e., welfare and individual security alongside wealth generation; and environmentalism ('new green' values). The protection of the farm and forestry population (old 'greenness') has not been forgotten, but sectional interests have not been allowed to prevail over a perception of the wider national interest. A good example of this was the decision of a badly divided Center Party ultimately to support Finnish membership of the European Union (EU) despite overwhelming opposition from the farmers. The chairman, Esko Aho's threat to resign – which he would undoubtedly have carried out – was sufficient to prevent the party appearing still primarily concerned to defend agricultural class interests in the manner of the Norwegian sister party (Aho 1998, 132). This points to a crucial contrast.

In spite of their change of name and concern to expand from being class parties, the Swedish and Norwegian Center parties have appeared at various times to be *single issue parties,* closely identified in the public view with an unequivocal stance on controversial questions like opposition to nuclear energy in Sweden and opposition to EU membership in Norway. This has been their greatest strength and their biggest weakness, delivering significant short-term electoral growth to the Swedish Center in the early 1970s and Norwegian party in 1993, but growth that proved ephemeral. In contrast, the Finnish practice of government co-operation 'across the blocs' – that is, involving socialist and non-socialist parties – has militated towards pragmatic policy stances and a concern to avoid marginalization through single-issue attachment. In short, the Finnish Center Party has not been linked to a single issue in the same way. Avoiding controversial issues may well be regarded as consonant with the pursuit of a catchall strategy, albeit one directed towards the achievement of middle-term rather than short-term gains.

In line with Kirchheimer, the position of the Center Party leadership has in practice been consolidated vis-à-vis members in an era of 'electronic democracy.' As Katz & Mair have observed: 'The rise of television as the most widely used source of political information enhances the conditions that allow, or indeed compel, parties to make universal appeals directly to voters rather than communicating principally to and through their core supporters (Katz & Mair 1995, 13). The leader in short is (and must be) the party's principal electoral asset. It is no coincidence that in an attempt to make a decisive breakthrough in the capital city and return – two MPs for the first time ever – party chairman Aho ran as a candidate in Helsinki at the general election in March 1999.

Equally, the leader is the party's principal strategist, both in and out of government. Väyrynen's determination to challenge the Social Democrats by engaging the non-socialist majority in the cabinet has been noted. At his initiative, the non-socialist ministers in January 1984 produced a nine-point policy declaration setting out goals on *inter alia* child care support in the home, electricity production, the taxation of small and medium-sized enterprises, the reduction of unemployment (at seven percent the highest ever) and various environmental measures (Hallituksen 25.1.1984). In consequence, relations between the Center and Social Democrats predictably deteriorated and reached breaking point in 1987, when *before* the general election that year Väyrynen and the Conservative leader, Ilkka Suominen, did a secret deal to form a non-socialist coalition (under the Center chairman) and exclude the Social Democrats (Almgren 1998, 136–46). Things badly misfired when the maneuver was blocked by president Koivisto and the result was the end of an era of red-green governmental co-operation stretching back to the Cajander 'red mud' cabinet between 1937–39.

A crucial strategic consideration for the leadership today is the need to balance the coalition of interests within the Center Party. This factor has cast the leader at times in the role of mediator, conciliator and, as noted in the case of Aho and the decision on EU accession, brinkman. Aho insists that he traveled to the Jyväskylä party conference ready to return 'a former party chairman and former prime minister' and with his political career effectively at an end (Aho 1998, 132). The authority of his position, however, won the day and swung the party clearly behind his pro-EU stance.

Turning to the organizational arena, the Agrarian-Center, like the other large Finnish parties, is hierarchically organized, with the local party branch organized territorially at the base. All local branches are members of a party district, the boundaries of which usually (though not always) coincide with a parliamentary constituency. The local branches have the right to nominate delegates to meetings of the council of the party district and are also represented at the party's conference. Moreover, all the subnational organizations are represented on the party council (*puoluevaltuuskunta*) (Sundberg 1992, 161–62). Significantly, however, it was four decades after its inception before the Agrarian Party became a class-mass party.

In other words, it was only after the second world war that the party developed a mass political organization, largely in response to the challenge of relegalized communism. Then, as Sundberg has written, competition for votes and the recruitment of members penetrated practically every village and street (ibid., 160) Particularly during the period of Sukselainen's chairmanship, the Agrarians created an outstanding mass organization, and the *tupailta* or 'gathering in the farmhouse living-room' became a celebrated institution. In 1945, membership was under 30,000; by 1964, it had increased almost tenfold to 280,000 (Aho 1998, 21). At its peak, the Agrarian-Center averaged almost nine local associations per municipality compared with three in the case of the Communists, Social Democrats and Conservatives (Sundberg 1992, 162). In 1985, the Center Party's membership was almost one and a half times that of all the other three large parties put together (see Table 5), whilst ten years later the member-voter ratio was an impressive

Table 5. Membership of the Main Finnish Parties, 1945–95

	Finnish People's Democratic League/ VAS	Social Democratic Party	Center	Conservatives
1954	62218	62669	168651	90684
1962	61139	44828	270061	86737
1975	56561	99463	296879	77170
1985	35887	92032	298670	76325
1995	16351	70176	257473	47200

Source: Sundberg 1996, 88–89.

1:2 (Vuosikirja 1995, 24). Clearly, therefore, the shift to a catchall strategy did not involve downgrading the role of individual members or de-emphasizing the party's class-mass features. On the contrary, the aim was to consolidate the recruitment of the *classe gardée* at a time when a decline in its numbers coincided with increased party political competition for the farm/rural vote, initially from the Communists and after 1970 from the Rural Party too.

True, the period of rapid membership growth has definitely come to an end. Moreover, the professionalization of the party leadership – an increase in the number of party officials – concomitant on the introduction of state subventions in 1967 has led to something of a decline in *membership activity* and a growing dependence on services (posters, leaflets and other propaganda) provided by the central office (Sundberg 1992, 176). Nonetheless, the Agrarian-Center retains the primary features of a mass party, and members have not become cheerleaders. Indeed, maintaining a mass membership has been necessary in order to fill all the relevant positions in local government, parish councils and cooperative bodies with party members (ibid., 179).

In the electoral-parliamentary arena, the Agrarian-Center strategy has in essence been to maintain its special (farm-based) clientele, whilst in Kirchheimer's words, seeking to embrace 'a variety of other clienteles' (Kirchheimer 1990, 52). Electoral activity, in other words, has remained as much about the heightened mobilization of the party's core support group as the conversion of voters to the Agrarian-Center cause (cf. Mair 1997, 95), although the latter was prioritized. There was a 'both-and' rather than 'either-or' approach and the challenge was to straddle the urban-rural, consumer-producer cleavages, that is to embrace constituencies patently lacking a community of interests.

It was with a view to having an electoral foot in both rural and urban camps that in February 1961 the prime minister's political secretary, Kalervo Siikala, proposed amending the party's name to 'Agrarian Party-Center Party.' Thereafter, in December 1961, some Helsinki-based Agrarians, with the understanding of the party leadership, founded a puppet party, the Finnish Center Party (*Suomen Keskustapuolue*). The main figures behind it were Siikala and the writer Jouko Tyyri, whilst the party chairman was the Agrarian minister of justice, Pauli Lehtosalo. The aim was to capitalize on the strong pro-Kekkonen, pro-Agrarian climate (in the wake of the successful resolution of the so-called Note Crisis) to capture support in the urban 'deep south.' However, the puppet party managed only six thousand votes in Helsinki and even less in the hinterland constituencies of Uusimaa and Häme South. Although this Finnish Center Party (mark 1) came to nought, Siikala has argued that it expedited the Agrarians' change of name (Keränen 1984, 86–87).

Following the latter, the Center Party set its sights on attracting the first generation of urban dwellers with roots and relatives in the countryside. By the 1980s, however, post-industrialization had brought diminished subjective class identity, weakened partisan identification and increased electoral volatility. By 1991, only 44 percent of Finns – compared with 65 percent in 1975 – placed themselves voluntarily in a social class and, in the case of the Center Party, the figure was only 34 percent (Pesonen, Sänkiaho & Borg 1993, 115–16). The massive growth in service sector employment in particular offered the Center a route to an urban support base.

Finally, on the question of the party-group link, the Agrarian-Center Party has had a strong corporatist connection throughout the independence period and remains a corporative party. As Sundberg has insisted: 'The Center Party, with its extremely large membership base, is dependent on the much smaller agricultural producer's organization [MTK] which provides the party with a core of active members, economic support and staffing assistance' (Sundberg 1992, 168). Yet it is important to note that in contrast to Norway, the Finnish Agrarian Party was not founded as the political arm of the agricultural producer's organization which, as in Sweden, it antedated. Moreover, although informal links at the elite level are strong (and the MTK leader Heikki Haavisto was appointed foreign secretary by Center prime minister Esko Aho in 1993), the Center Party is not dictated to by MTK which has no formal input into the party's policy making. Following Finnish membership of the EU, the power of MTK has in any event declined, and the Center has pursued a strategy of 'keeping its distance', not least to change the popular conception that the two organizations work hand in glove.

In line with Kirchheimer, the Center has indeed sought to secure access to the leading non-primary sector interest groups, although its relations as a governing party with the central blue-collar federation SAK in the early 1990s were difficult and fractious. The Center has had only modest success in claiming a membership base in the main industrial and public sector unions. Approximately two thirds of MTK members support the Center Party. In contrast, a survey in 1996 revealed that 9.1 percent of SAK members were Center supporters whilst the following year the figure for the white-collar federation STTK was 12.5 percent. Significantly, in both surveys about two fifths of respondents declined to identify their partisan allegiance. The academic-professional association, *Akava*, has not included any political questions in its survey of members.

From Class Party to Catchall Party?

In proceeding to assess how far the Finnish Agrarian-Center has been able to transform itself in just over three decades from a class party based

Table 6. The Changing Nature of the Center Party's Support Base, 1948–1991. Percent

	1948	1966	1973	1982	1991
Farmers	81	72	60	40	35
Workers	16	18	23	28	27
Salaried employees	2	6	15	25	38
Managers/directors	1	4	2	7	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Sänkiaho 1991, 38.

primarily on the farmers to a catchall party with broad-based social support, Sweden and Norway offer contrasting experiences. The political cohesion of the Swedish Agrarian-Center has been relatively low. Up to the 1956 general election, the Swedish Agrarians received only half the farming vote, the remaining half being shared by the Conservatives (25 percent) and the Liberal and Social Democrats (a combined 25 percent) (Lindström 1979, 7). True, at the 1956 election, when the party's vote plunged to an all-time low, farmers accounted for 77 percent of their support. But within twenty years of the Swedish Agrarian Party's change of name – that is, in 1976 – only 18 percent of its voters were farmers, whilst no more than 37.5 percent of the party's supporters came from rural areas. In Norway, in contrast, the Agrarian Party ran candidates only in rural districts and in 1949, for example, virtually four fifths of its support derived from farmers – 33 percent small farmers and 46 percent large farmers (Barton 1998, 76–77). Excluding the protest surge in 1993, when the Center profited from a strong vein of anti-EU sentiment, between 70 and 80 percent of the party's supporters still live in rural areas (Christensen 1997, 392).

When considering the changing nature of the Finnish Agrarian-Center's support it is clearly important to look at i) the social composition of the Center Party's vote; ii) the political cohesion of the main social classes – farmers, workers and salaried employees; and iii) the regional distribution of party support. Table 6 sets out the changing nature of the Center Party's electorate between 1948–1991, whilst Table 7 analyses party support by occupation in February 1995.

It can be seen that the Center Party's support base comprises substantial backing from the farmers. In the first general election after its change of name in 1966, nearly three quarters of Center Party voters were farmers. True, this figure had dropped to two fifths in 1982 whilst by 1991, a narrow majority of party supporters were salaried employees, *toimihenkilöt* (Sänkiaho 1991, 38). However, whereas on the eve of the 1995 general

Table 7. Party Support by Occupation in February 1995. Percent

Party	Agri-culture	Blue Collar	Entre-preneurs	Cleri-cal	Mana-gers	Students	Pen-sioners	Others	Total
Swedish People's Party	3	16	10	21	10	19	18	3	100
Center	19	31	3	13	4	9	18	4	100
Leftist Alliance	3	58	0	13	0	5	18	2	100
Greens	2	29	2	35	2	18	7	5	100
Conservatives	1	16	8	36	9	14	15	1	100
Social Dem. Party	0	43	4	23	2	5	22	1	100

Source: Arter 1995, 199.

Table 8. The Farm Vote by Party 1983–1991. Percent

Party	1983	1987	1991
Social Democratic Party	–	2	–
Conservatives	13	16	19
Center	70	74	74
Leftist Alliance	–	2	–
Swedish People's Party	4	2	4
Finnish Rural Party	9	4	–
Finnish Christian League	4	–	–
Greens	–	–	3
Total	100	100	100

Source: Pesonen, Sänkiaho & Borg 1993, 108.

election only one fifth of Center support derived from farmers, this compared with a mere three percent or less in all the other parties (Arter 1995, 199).

Importantly too, the collapse of the Rural Party, coupled with the estrangement of the larger farmers in the south-west from the strongly pro-EU Conservatives, have meant that *the political cohesion of the farmers has risen in recent years*. At the general elections of 1987 and 1991, as Table 8 demonstrates, three quarters of all farmers voted for the Center – this figure would have exceeded 80 percent if only the Finnish farmers had been included – compared with less than a fifth for the Conservatives and virtually nothing at all for the two leftist parties (Pesonen, Sänkiaho & Borg 1993, 108).

The proportion of the Center's vote emanating from the blue-collar population has also risen – from under one quarter in 1973 to nearly one third in 1995. This last figure was twice that of the Conservatives (working class conservatism has always been weak in mainland Scandinavia), albeit less than the two fifths of the Social Democrats' vote deriving from the

Table 9. The Blue-Collar Vote by Party 1983–91. Percent

Party	1983	1987	1991
Social Democratic Party	38	36	34
Conservatives	11	12	5
Center	9	14	21
Leftist Alliance	24	23	24
Swedish People's Party	3	1	1
Finnish Rural Party	12	8	3
Finnish Christian League	2	2	3
Greens	2	2	5
Others	–	3	4
Total	100	100	100

Source: Pesonen, Sänkiaho and Borg, 1993, 108.

blue-collar electorate and the nearly three fifths of the Leftist Alliance's vote coming from the same source. Most significantly, the proportion of blue-collar workers backing the Center has increased in recent years to over one fifth in 1991, four times more than the Conservatives' share and only narrowly behind that of the radical left (see Table 9). In the period 1983–91 *the proportion of blue-collar workers supporting the Finnish Center more than doubled.*

The Center's support from salaried employees rose over sixfold in the quarter of a century after the party's change of name. In 1991, 38 percent of the Center vote came from the salariat compared with 43 percent for the Social Democrats and 77 percent for the Conservatives. In recent elections, moreover, approximately one sixth of this white-collar workforce has

Table 10. The Salaried Vote by Party 1983–91. Percent

Party	1983	1987	1991
Social Democratic Party	21	22	18
Conservatives	38	28	30
Center	14	15	17
Leftist Alliance	6	8	6
Swedish People's Party	6	7	8
Finnish Rural Party	7	8	6
Finnish Christian League	3	3	2
Greens	3	5	9
Others	1	4	3
Total	100	100	100

Source: Pesonen, Sänkiaho & Borg 1993, 108.

Table 11. The Social Composition of Support for the Larger Finnish Parties in 1991. Percent

Occupation	Party			
	Leftist Alliance	Social Democratic Party	Center	Conservatives
Farmers	–	4	35	10
Workers	68	52	27	13
Salaried employees	32	43	38	77
Managers/directors	–	–	–	–
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Sänkiaho 1991, 38.

supported the Center (see Table 10). All in all, the proportion of the Center's vote from the farmers has halved, that of blue-collar workers risen by 10 percent, and the share of its vote from salaried employees increased by 32 percent since 1966. *Today the preponderant share of the Center vote comes from the new middle classes.*

In 1991 there was roughly a three-way split in the Center's electorate between these three groupings, making it possible to argue a persuasive case for the Center having the most diversified socio-economic support base of any of the Finnish parties (see Table 11). The Center is virtually the only party of the Finnish-speaking farmers, whilst about one fifth of the blue-collar workers and one sixth of the salaried employees vote for it. Clearly this is not the profile of a class party. In contrast, the Leftist Alliance relies first and foremost on blue-collar support, the Conservatives on white-collar votes and the Social Democrats roughly equally on workers and salaried employees.

Furthermore, in the 1990s *the Center Party has been the only party with significantly above its national average support in the 'other Finland'* – that is, the seven central and northern constituencies away from the populated 'deep south.' In 1991, the Center Party's poll was no less than 13.4 percent up on its national average in these areas where it claimed not far short of two fifths of the total vote. In 1995, although falling back by five percent nationally compared with its record victory in 1991, the Center vote in the central and northern constituencies was still 5.1 percent ahead of the big election winner, the Social Democrats. The differential between the Center Party's national average and central-northern poll was +12 percent and between the central-southern and central-northern results a massive +18.4 percent.

Summing up, the Center Party's electoral center of gravity remains in its historic, agriculture-dominant core support areas in northern and eastern

Finland where it remains comfortably the largest party with between just under one third and just under two fifths of the vote (Vanhanen 1991, 87–97). In the rural towns in these stronghold areas, the Center Party has succeeded in increasing its support significantly since the 1960s. For example, support in Vaasa has increased nearly fivefold since 1966 and nearly tripled in Seinäjoki, Joensuu and Kokkala. Even in the losing election in 1995, the Center vote rose in, *inter alia*, Vaasa and Seinäjoki. Particularly in its historic support regions, the Center is a catchall party embracing urban as well as rural voters.

Several important caveats should nonetheless be entered. First, *the Agrarian-Center Party has gained virtually no support at all in the Swedish-speaking communes*, even those situated in its historic core regions. It was the last of all the parties formally to become bilingual and, particularly during the inter-war period, had a history of championing Finnish and attacking the privileges of the Swedish-speaking elite. In short, it has emphatically not been a catchall party in the sense of embracing both national languages.

Second, in the six large cities in southern Finland, the growth in the Center vote has been slow and the level of party support has remained at five percent or below. The average Center poll in the cities of Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, Turku, Tampere and Lahti rose from a mere 2.7 percent in 1966 to a modest 7.9 percent in 1991 before falling to 4.6 percent in 1995. In the context of the high level of electoral volatility and low levels of partisan identification in these southern cities, one so-called 'mega-candidate' can attract many thousands of extra votes to the party. In Uusimaa in 1991, foreign secretary Paavo Väyrynen won 48 percent of the total constituency vote, whilst in the same year Eeva Kuuskoski's 40 percent of the party's constituency total enabled the Center to become the largest party in Turku south for the first time (Miettinen & Huuhtanen 1997).

Third, in the capital city, Helsinki, where the party has never succeeded in electing more than one MP, the Center has generally fared best in those districts where the population is younger than average and comprises families with children living in rented accommodation on relatively low incomes. The east and north of Helsinki are the party's 's'rong areas', although these are also the areas where the turnout has been lowest (Miettinen 1997). It was precisely with a view to mobilizing extra support in these areas that Esko Aho ran in the capital in March 1999.

Concluding Remarks

Of the three Nordic Center parties with a capital 'C', the Finnish party appears the only one successfully to have transformed itself into a catchall

party. At the last general election in 1995, its support was nearly four times greater than its Swedish counterpart at the last general election there in 1998 and three times greater than its Norwegian sister party's performance in 1997. It possesses the most heterogeneous support base of all the Finnish parties. It is the only party with substantial backing among the Finnish-speaking farmers and the only party with support significantly above its national average in the relatively sparsely populated regions outside the southern third of the country. In its traditional core areas in northern and eastern Finland in particular, the Center Party may be said to be a catchall party with roughly equal amounts of support from farmers, blue-collar workers and the white-collar salariat.

During the difficult electoral times which followed the party's change of name, the notable strength of the Center's organizational network was crucial both in maintaining its core support base and, through the party's strength in municipal politics, in attracting new elements to the party. The growth in support for the Center in the rural towns in the 1970s was particularly important. Generational turnover also meant the emergence by the 1980s of an educated, less obviously agrarian-based leadership. The present case study in short lends support to Mair's statement that: 'There is no denying the reality of the shift from mass parties or mass integration parties towards a more catchall model' (Mair 1990, 119).

Nonetheless, in the case of the Finnish Agrarian-Center Party, a number of important 'how far?' questions arise. First, given the pronounced north-south differential in the strength of the Center's support, how far can a party with such an accentuated regional profile be described as a catchall party? Second, how far has the expansion of its support base beyond the *classe gardée* been the consequence of consciously pursued catchall strategies à la Kirchheimer, and how far has it been facilitated by rapid social structural change and, in particular, the emergence of an urban salariat – that is, a new, socially and geographically mobile and electorally accessible middle class generally lacking high levels of partisan identification? Third, how far can a party manifesting the salient electoral attributes – broadly based support – be described as a catchall party when it lacks the primary organizational features of a catchall party as described by Kirchheimer? Crucially, the party is still a mass political organization.

Partywatching would be simple if it were like birdwatching. However, the present analysis suggests that the catchall species is difficult to spot even with the most powerful binoculars. In the case of the Finnish Agrarian-Center, this is simply because it has never existed in the form described by Kirchheimer. This is not to vindicate Kirchheimer in excluding small democracies and Agrarian parties from his purview. The Finnish Agrarian-Center has indeed transformed itself, even if not in line with Kirchheimer's

model, and this fact must cast further doubt on the continued utility of one of the most influential theories of party change.

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model, and this fact must cast further doubt on the continued utility of one of the most influential theories of party change.

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