14. Party Functions

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THE purpose of this chapter is to describe what the political party does. The student must keep in mind at all times the vast physical spread of the party over the country, its huge membership of people from all walks and stations of life, and its elaborate formal and informal organization. These important facts, depicted in the preceding chapter, underlie the party at work. They indicate the variety of functions that must be occurring and also set the rules and limits on what functions can actually be fulfilled.

Two types of functions

A necessary first step is to distinguish two general types of functions a party performs. Some functions are acknowledged openly to be the party

goals, such as winning elections. Other functions occur without forethought or plan, and may even be disliked by many people. The former are termed *professed* functions; the latter are called *latent* functions. They can be compared to the functions of a fishing trip that a man may undertake. Catching fish is the professed function of his actions. Yet other functions of the trip may be to relax his nerves, to think over some personal or business problems, to get away from his family, and so on. These are the latent functions of the fishing trip.

Just as fishing trips have professed functions, so has the political party. They are (1) proposing goals for society to follow; (2) putting forward candidates for office; (3) waging political campaigns; and (4) operating or criticizing the government. The latent functions of the political party include (1) the fulfillment of personal ambitions; (2) the obtaining of profitable group concessions; (3) the expression of social sentiments; and (4) the provision of means for social mobility. The two groups of functions may be taken up in order.

THE PROFESSED FUNCTIONS

Proposing goals for society

The American parties are the objects of much scorn for not fulfilling what is regarded as an essential function of a political party: the declaration of noble human goals toward which the party can lead the nation. The chief reason for wanting parties, many say, is to give society some sense of direction, some possible plan for achieving social happiness. In truth, back of most political parties there does lie an evangelistic origin: they were born "to save the community from a horrible fate." But few parties have ever struggled into adulthood and power without shedding most of their evangelism. Their creed and gospel are transformed by the toil of campaigning and by the compromises needed to secure power; indeed, parties are often converted to a new gospel before they have had time to succeed with the old. The Democratic Party has stood for many things at different times and even at the same time: it has been the party of pure democracy, the party of States' rights, the party of slavery, the party of immigrants, the party of great liberal reform, and the party for liberating the world from tyranny. The Republican Party, in its briefer life-span, has been the party of homesteading farmers, of anti-slavery, of saving the federal union, of the monopolies, of free enterprise, and of peace and nationalism.

Such great issues exist in the history of the parties, and echoes of them resound even in contemporary political campaigns. But the problem of the party leaders at any moment is more short-term and humble. It is that of winning the next election. And great issues do not run off ticker tape into their campaign headquarters. To be fair to many politicians, it must

Public Opinion Generates Often in Small Groups Gathered at Stores, Barber Shops, Clubs, Taverns, and Hotels. Here is a prize-winning picture of the traditional general store, pot-bellied stove, and informal group of citizens.

be said that they are pathetically eager to find a campaign issue—always with the proviso, however, that they can take a stand on it without losing an election. There is a statement in training troops for war that "a dead soldier is not a good soldier"; in politics, a losing politician is not a "good" one. Hence a "good" politician strains for the issue (1) that wins more votes than it loses and (2) that he believes is good for the country, or for whomever he wants to do good.

Difficulty of Creating Issues: On the whole, "natural" issues are more effective than "created" issues. Many politicians—and a large fraction of the public and the press agree with the belief—think that they can create issues. But they can do so only in a limited sense; for issues are very difficult to create. The public, or a large part of it, is generally paying some attention to the political process; but the attention is at a low level and is difficult to manipulate because of its ponderous and vague character. "War or peace," "jobs or unemployment," "honesty or corruption," and "Communism or Americanism" are some of the large issues that have found their way into recent campaigns. These issues cannot be raised from the dead; they can be played upon only for what they are worth, and events that are far beyond the ability of politicians or parties to affect give rise to them and give them most of their force.

Other issues of a more specific character, such as the repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act, the creation of a national Fair Employment Practices Commission to prevent discrimination against Negroes in employment, or a withdrawal of diplomatic recognition from the Soviet Union, are in the air, certainly. However, they reach only limited segments of the public, and, when they lack exciting possibilities, can be acclaimed vociferously to little avail. Both with the very general issues and with such specific issues, the political party can have only a most limited freedom; the political party or some section of it cannot make an issue effective when the public, and perhaps also the press, are bored with the subject or little interested in it.

Modest Role in Setting Goals: Is then this function of proposing goals for a society one for which the parties must be ill-equipped and inadequate? In the absolute sense, yes; in a relative sense, however, there can be little doubt of the educative effect of parties. The level of public discourse may be generally not high; yet even the attainment of that level is due, in part, to the efforts of politicians and the rank and file of the party. The fact is, and several recent studies reveal it clearly, that the most vocal, active, informed Americans on the issues that are before the country in a practical form for action are the strong supporters of one party or the other. Those who know the issues, who are aware of what is happening locally, regionally, and nationally, who stir up argumentation, are the stauncher Republicans and Democrats. Hence party activity has some educative effect upon party members and the public in general.

Furthermore, in a number of localities, particularly in urban areas, campaigns are often waged over heated issues that are of vital concern to the voters. A real choice between pro-union and pro-business policies, or

between other important alternatives, is offered in the character of the candidates. For example, a working-class area in Detroit may send a spokesman to Congress to strive for the repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act. Or the Harlem district in New York may elect a representative to Congress to fight for the equal rights of Negroes. Or Arizona may expect its congressmen to argue for water rights in the Colorado River basin. In such cases, parties (or portions thereof) do set up goals for society.

However, these local calls to arms do not summon a disciplined response from the two parties in Congress. The candidates can truly promise no more than to fight for their goals if elected; they cannot guarantee the achievement of the goals. When elected, they must content themselves with marking time, with delivering pleas on behalf of their cause, and with watching for those fleeting opportunities when they can work their ideas into legislation.

Putting forward candidates

Beside fulfilling an expressed function of proposing various goals for the community, a party has the task of putting forward candidates who are to occupy the many thousands of elective offices throughout the nation. Candidacy is no simple matter akin to stepping forward to give blood for a Red Cross blood bank. To be a candidate for public office one must satisfy certain eligibility rules that the laws lay down: residence, citizenship, age, and a few other minor requirements. There also are social eligibility rules that are outside the law but important, nevertheless: length of residence in the community, marital status, and veteran's status. Additional social considerations include some that are general, such as pleasing manners and appearance, and the lack of a penal record; and some that are peculiar to the constituency, such as religion and national origins. There are qualifications of skill and experience—what would make people believe that the candidate is able to do a good job? Can he deliver a speech well? Does he have some acquaintance, no matter how tenuous, with the post he hopes to occupy? There are also a number of routine (and sometimes technically involved) requirements for proposing candidacy: what does one do to file; how many people must support one's candidacy; what are the dates of filing; how closely are the applications scrutinized; how much money is needed; and more questions of the same type.

Many people are eliminated as candidates by their inability or incapacity to run the gantlet described. But more serious considerations then arise: How does one find a man with the stated qualities? Having found him, how does one persuade him to run for office? Probably most men and women are unable to contemplate themselves as candidates for public office. Some are physically incapable of the strain of running. Others are psychologically quite unsuited to subjecting themselves to the sardonic or even sympathetic scrutiny of thousands of eyes. A great many never regard the matter seriously, and no one suggests that they do. The possible candidates must be chosen from the very few people who can stand the gaff.

Still, however, these few must have jobs that will permit them leave or time to campaign. The nature of their work must not preclude politicking either because they would lose customers or earnings, or because they derive their salary from a government agency so that they are prevented by law from politicking. Personal considerations enter again, in that often incompatible plans have been laid that would be upset by campaigning—perhaps a vacation or a temporary residence in another place.

Then enter all the partisan considerations: Is the person a loyal party man, or at least has he or she been silent about his or her politics? What enemies has the potential candidate made among the party regulars, among those who must be counted on to do the work of advocating his candidacy? Furthermore, does the potential candidate hold the "right" views on the issues, such as they may be? Does he share more or less the morality of the party workers? Does he have money to support his campaign and that of others, or does he have friends or acquaintances who would put up money to see him run?

By the time that all of these considerations, or even a part of them, are satisfied, very few candidates are left for the 800,000 elective offices that the State constitutions and legislatures have created. It is little wonder that the voter is often confronted on his ballot with the same scarred and spavined old war horses with whom he has become familiar through many an electoral campaign. At least, to the eternally timid leaders, catastrophe is unlikely with such reliable and tested candidates. Furthermore, having campaigned before, the candidates of yesteryear have names and faces that are known by many of the voters. And, of course, although the federal elective offices are few, it is asking a great deal of the party or its candidates to entrust those candidacies to untried persons who have served the party little or not at all in times gone by. Therefore, it is largely true that in a democracy, whereas many common citizens feel that they are potentially ideal candidates for public office, the political party finds all too few candidates, even among those who are not illustrious.

Waging political campaigns

The parties conduct campaigns, but candidates do likewise. Sometimes the one overshadows the other. The party is often well organized, with a machine that carries the candidate along with it, leaving only certain specialized functions to him. At other times, the party is almost non-existent, so that the candidate must found his own organization, such as it is, as he goes along. There is, in other words, a maximum and a minimum party role in campaigns. Since great differences in campaigning come about because of party strength and weakness, it is perhaps most useful to depict two types of campaign, one in an area of well-organized parties and the other in an area where the party mechanism is extremely feeble. A great many jurisdictions, of course, fall between these two poles, and share the characteristics of each.

Campaigns by Strong Organizations: At its peak of efficiency, a party closely resembles a disciplined army. It is professional; its rank and file

as well as its leaders derive much or all of their income from party work and its legal and illegal sources of revenue. It is fully manned; all posts are filled down to those of precinct captain and assistant precinct captain in each voting district of the area. It is cohesive; loyalty is strong among leaders and followers. It has a single leadership, and the leaders have distinct lines of command down to the precinct workers. It has a specialized staff for public speaking, propaganda, treating with friendly interests, collecting money, purchasing supplies, and making arrangements for meetings; it has espionage and counter-espionage agents, and a central secretarial and clerical staff.

It is not very concerned with issues and the flights of fancy that sometimes overtake amateurs, whether in war or politics; its operations are humdrum and detailed, conducted soberly, with planning and forethought; they are somewhat cautious, and without illusions. It tends to favor slow change in most political, economic, and social matters; no political machine in the United States that strove to accelerate the pace of change has lasted for more than a few years. The party sometimes has "liberal" candidates on its ticket, often to counteract the presence of candidates temporarily in bad odor. It reaches out in all directions for sources of support and revenue, asking little of the ideology of the sources but as much as it can of their favors and money.

In its strongest form, the party usually maintains a number of corrupt connections, even when it has rich financial support from entertainment businesses, public utilities, and all sorts of private enterprise. One reason for the underworld character of some of its operations lies undoubtedly in the unfortunate circumstances from which most of the rank and file, and even the top managers, have risen. Another is the greater reliability of supporters who are dependent upon police protection, which is controlled by the organization.

The candidates are picked as a team and run as one. Most have long periods of service to the party, justifying their public promotion, even though their merits be inconsiderable in the eyes of the population as a whole. A measurement of merit becomes difficult for the public to make, except upon some absolute scale, since candidates that correspond to the specifications of a reform group or a professor of philosophy infrequently present themselves for comparison. Where the machine is not menaced by the other major party, it fills its slate of candidates by internal priorities; the men who are the most deserving by the criteria of the machine achieve the most desirable places. Where defeat is possible, a balanced ticket is made up that is calculated to appeal to the outside world.

Long practice has made the organization expert in coping with the great volume of legal detail surrounding the operations of the party system. Its files, traditions, experienced personnel, and habits give it a group memory. Amateurs, reformers, "johnnies-come-lately," and unorganized opponents lack such advantages. The party knows when to begin preparations for conventions or primary elections, when to file for candidates, and how to circulate nominating petitions quickly in legal fashion. It knows all about

the convention—where it is to be held, who will be there, how it will work, and how it will be controlled—because it has had a hand in deciding all these matters. It knows what can be spent on a campaign, how much it can collect, and where the money can be obtained. It remembers to get its supporters on the election boards in the precincts. Its precinct captains make personal calls on all the voters, urging their support of the slate with arguments suited to the individual rather than to the predispositions of the captain (he is helped in this by the group memory again, because the voter's ideas and past behavior are known and often recorded).

On election day, the machine is busy before dawn, making sure that all the polls are staffed and that the machine is represented when the new ballots come into the polling places. Approaches to the polls are placarded so far as is legally permitted. All friendly voters are urged to vote, for a great many elections are decided not by the *general* public's opinion but by the *voting* public's opinion, a difference in some cases of 60%. Under such circumstances the party that can get out the favorable vote has a great advantage, regardless of everything that has been said and done throughout the campaign.

How Machines Are Broken Up: How does change come to such an area? The greatest chance of change in the short run comes from deserters or factions. Occasionally a subordinate or a clique of subleaders becomes alienated by the leaders' practices and moves to evict them either by maneuvers within the organization, or by opposing them in a primary election, or by joining the opposition in a general election. Sometimes one of the higher committees, such as the county or State central committee, splits into factions; the contestants then seek support down the line, thus splitting also a large number of local organizations. Other more long-range causes of the overthrow of machines are a severe economic crisis that alienates even the voters traditionally friendly to them, or a program of social security measures and full employment that causes people to be less dependent on the charitable aspects of the organization's function.

Campaigning in Weak Party Areas: Very few parts of the United States today have strong party organizations; the remaining cases are found in some sections of a number of the older eastern and midwestern cities. A somewhat larger number of areas have party organizations that try to model themselves on the type. The vast majority of American localities are organized politically by networks of men in shifting alliances, which ordinarily stop short of crossing party lines. The campaign functions of the political parties under these circumstances are not nearly so numerous or important. The party, instead of acquiring what seems like an existence or character of its own, is quite simply represented in the characters of a few individuals and in the laws governing parties, which the courts compel these men to follow.

In an area of extreme party disintegration, the elaborate set of committees still exists, for the laws are fairly uniform throughout the United States; however, vacancies often occur on the committees, for the men and women who hold posts on them are not professional politicians or necessarily

influential citizens. There are usually a few old hands in the area to whom one goes for information and aid on party matters. They have served on such committees, or have run for office in the past. They may be officials of the government administering the law of parties. They may have connections with the national and State party leaders, or may have held patronage appointments under previous administrations of their party. Sometimes they have given money and time to political work before. There may be no more than two or three dozen such men in a party in a county with 100,000 people; the number rarely exceeds 150.

There are no precinct captains in an area of extreme party disintegration. In their place are a number of persons who in the past have helped a candidate of the party, and who are known to the first group of "old-hand" leaders; in addition, each candidate brings with him a certain number of friends, relatives, and new acquaintances who are attracted by some belief or trait he possesses. Some of them will not be of the same party.

The potential candidate need have served the party little in the past, and there is little the party can do for him in the present. He obtains a certain amount of good will from the old hands and their networks of acquaintances, some good advice, and much of the money he is apt to obtain. Also, he gets the benefit or harm of the party label beside his name on the ballot. In middle-sized communities and in most constituencies of more than a few thousand voters, fewer than half the voters will know one name from another on election day; a candidate will be carried along or cast ashore by general tides over which he has little control. Of the small proportion of voters who stoutly refuse to accept a party label as meaningful, the largest part will not know the candidates either. They will vote for an incumbent, or the man whose name appears first on the ballot, or toward whose name they are drawn. They may select one whose occupation or address pleases them, or for whom they have some affinity owing to some snatch of news about him that has come to their attention in the campaign. It is the task of the candidate and a half-dozen friends to set up his campaign committee, circulate petitions for nomination, distribute campaign materials, and otherwise conduct the campaign.

The candidate who is an incumbent has a good chance of election under the conditions of an unintegrated party system. Holding office gives him the advantage of access to all those people in the area who are normally concerned with the operations of the office. He has therefore a network of influence that is already activated and that substitutes for the kind provided by the party in a well-organized area.

Also, an unintegrated party system favors the party whose candidates have money, or who come from or represent the professional, managerial, and brokerage occupations. The former is true because money can, up to a point, buy the special services needed; indeed, in areas such as the one being described, the rise of professional campaign managers, usually going under the title of public relations consultants, is marked in recent years. The latter is true because candidates who come from such social circles know more people who are engaged in work necessitating human contacts.

especially with the more affluent and important members of society. On the whole, in consequence of these greater uses of money and contacts, Republicans hold an edge over Democrats, who generally come from, or depend upon, less tightly-knit groups of people and the support of individuals who work with things rather than with other human beings, such as clerks, semi-skilled and unskilled workers, and owners of small farms.

In an unorganized party area, the amount of "independent" voting is considerable. Candidates of the one party make frequent, successful raids on the membership of the other party. Only in a narrow sense can the voters of the area be called non-partisan. Their liking for one or the other party remains; however, being under little party pressure to vote the straight ticket, they naturally do not carry out their party's wishes seriously. When party disorganization is further supplemented and assisted by open primaries and other election laws that encourage split-ticket voting, many people will vote split tickets so that an independent candidacy is stimulated further, to the point often of the candidate's refusing to identify himself with the views of either party—although he still shuns identifying himself with a third or minor party.

The party system in much of the South is a one-party replica of both extremes of party organization described here. In a few places, factions of the Democratic Party are well organized and fight one another as machines, in, for example, New Orleans. By contrast, in most southern districts party organization may be almost absent, and the situation will strongly resemble that of similar areas in the North and the West.

Operating the government

In victory or defeat, the American major party plays a role in the operation of government. If triumphant at the polls, the party's candidates become President and congressmen. The details of how the President and congressmen behave as party leaders are presented in a series of chapters to come. Here only a few general remarks about party government need expression.

Both the majority party and the minority party organize themselves in Congress. Members of the majority party in either chamber of Congress enjoy certain powers and offices that are denied to the minority party members. At the same time, the defeated party is not plunged into oblivion. It has the critic's functions. It has no representation, it is true, in the executive establishment, although from time to time, especially in foreign affairs, appointments of men from the minority party are made. But in Congress, the minority party members have the rights of representation upon all standing committees, of debate, and of introducing bills no matter what may be the likelihood of their passage. From their position in Congress they may denounce the majority and the President almost at will. They have their own group of congressional leaders who are ready to assume the direction of Congress should another election restore their majority status.

Furthermore, one faction of the minority party may find itself more at home with the majority leadership than with its own majority faction, not only on one issue but on a series of issues. Hence the defeat of the party in general does not mean necessarily a defeat for certain segments of the party. A number of "conservative" Democrats do not fear greatly an upset of "liberal" congressmen of their own party, even if it means a loss of their own committee chairmanships and of other perquisites of majority party members. The same is true of some "liberal" Republicans when their party loses control of their branch of Congress. Practically every member, however, regrets his party's loss of the presidency, because possession of that office is gratifying in so many ways that it tends to nullify any antagonism he may feel toward the ideas of the President himself.

LATENT FUNCTIONS

A second group of functions of the American political party may be called latent functions. These consist of those several party goals and activities that are not proclaimed openly as the goals of the party but are either given quiet recognition or are even condemned as unfortunate or harmful consequences of party activities.

Fulfillment of personal ambitions

The first of the latent functions of the party is to provide ambitious people with an avenue and a means to success. Over a hundred years ago Alexis de Tocqueville penned words that are as true now as they were then:

> The pains which are taken to create parties are inconceivable, and at the present day it is no easy task. In the United States there is no religious animosity, because all religion is respected and no sect is predominant; there is no jealousy of rank, because the people are everything and none can contest their authority; lastly, there is no public misery to serve as a means of agitation, because the physical condition of the country opens so wide a field to industry that man only needs to be let alone to be able to accomplish prodigies. Nevertheless, ambitious men will succeed in creating parties, since it is difficult to eject a person from authority on the mere ground that his place is coveted by others. All of the skill of the actors in the political world lies in the art of creating parties. A political aspirant in the United States begins by discerning his own interest, and discovering those other interests which may be collected around and amalgamated with it. He then contrives to find out some doctrine or principle which may suit the purpose of this new association, and which he adopts in order to bring forward his party and secure its popularity.

Practically every desire can find a congenial environment in political activity. Men enter party work to increase their incomes, to acquire prestige, to enjoy human companionship, to seek enlightenment about world events, to gain power, to vent their inner rages upon a legitimate object—the opposing party—and to practice a skill that they enjoy. They may not only wish one or more of these values for themselves, but may also wish them for others—in which event they can be called altruistic. And, of course, if this altruistic idea seems full and complete, they can then function

in psychological accord with the professed aim of the party to set goals for the society and to achieve those goals. Rarely does a person have such a well-integrated character, or do people agree that he has; consequently there almost always is not only a question of individual ambition in any political action, but also a considerable amount of evidence to that end.

Obtaining profitable group concessions

Not only individuals but also organized groups find fulfillment of needs in the party process. The hundreds of functions of government impinge upon thousands of groups. Consequently, groups engage in politics, for politics in some measure directs their lives. Of course, as the chapter on interest groups showed, many relations between groups and government consist of external negotiations between representatives of the parties and of the groups, or between permanent non-partisan officials and group representatives.

However, there remains an important fraction of the parties themselves that is composed of the groups or their representatives. It is well, for instance, that the Brewers' Association gives advice and applies pressure to party candidates; yet it is also effective to have agents or retainers as party officials or public officials. It is excellent for delegates from cities to express urban needs at a hearing before Congress; it is also useful to have mayors in prominent party posts. Greek maritime shippers may make effective representations to congressmen and to public opinion; they also do well if some of their important stockholders are also politicians. The National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People and other organizations work hard and successfully to promote the rights of Negroes, but they are pleased when Negro members of legislatures and Negro party leaders are also in a position to help. The list of cases could be extended indefinitely. It proves that the argument that pressure groups arise because the parties are too large to represent them, is not the whole truth; the parties themselves are to a degree interest group representatives.

Expression of social sentiments

The party is also an association of like-minded persons for the expression of social sentiments. A coldly objective analysis of all aspects of party activity will reveal that a "disproportionate" quantity of energy goes into this latent function to the "detriment" of the function of winning votes and capturing office. For every tea or picnic that is given to impress potential recruits and undecided voters, at least another is given for purely social intercourse among those already converted. It is often impossible to direct political clubs and cliques of party workers at their professed aim of winning elections, so enthralled are they by the cameraderie of fellow-believers.

Nor does it commonly occur to party workers to engage the opposition except formally and in a few picturesque encounters such as on a radio program or in a pamphlet. At some times the parties behave like the famous medieval Chinese mercenary armies that disturbed their pleasant

existences only to execute ritualistic maneuvers, replete with bugles, firecrackers, and gaudy uniforms, that were the prelude to a brief clash of arms followed by a prearranged armistice and a negotiated peace. Even in destructive modern times armies are plagued by the vast number of service troops and the small number of men on the firing line, many of the latter being found by intensive research to be loath to discharge their weapons.

Similar surveys of party workers disclose a comparable situation, with a great proportion of party workers supplying each other with information, ideas, plans, bulletins, slogans, transportation, and sympathetic audiences. Discussing at length what they should do and how they feel, they occasionally even speak disapprovingly of the few workers who labor among the undecided and the opposition, for, among those engaged in actual political struggle, embarrassing incidents, defeats, unseemly noises, recriminations, and other unpleasant encounters inevitably occur. True campaigning, in which energy is directed at the most vulnerable points of the opposition, is often arduous, routine, laborious, apt to incite counterattacks, undignified, and misunderstood. Many times it leaves scars. It is out of tune with the expression of congenial social sentiments.

A means of group mobility

In an early textbook on political parties Professors C. E. Merriam and H. F. Gosnell, of the University of Chicago, wrote that parties speeded up the process of Americanization. Over several generations the party helped millions of newcomers to obtain citizenship, to get jobs, to understand some of their constitutional rights, to see how other Americans lived, and otherwise to fit into American society. Large-scale immigration to the United States is ended, but the same general function remains. Although parties have not developed consciously for the purpose, they have constantly contributed aid to "under-privileged" groups of Americans.

The story of this function, even apart from its Americanization side, goes back to earliest America. Then the formation of parties was contemporary with such events as the birth of a free educational system and the distribution of free land, and operated with them as means by which the socially downtrodden groups of the backwoods, the hills, or the cities could climb upward economically and socially. Entrance to the upper levels of business and social leadership has never been so free as entrance to the upper levels of politics; furthermore the greater freedom of opportunity in politics has made the other areas more free than they would otherwise have been.

Today politics is still one of the most unguarded ladders of opportunity in America for individuals, and, by the same token, for numbers of individuals from the less privileged sections of society. Many American politicians have come from the poorer parts of the South, the melting-pot areas of the cities and country, and from that group of persons who are frustrated by purely personal circumstances from getting ahead.

Examples abound, although they are not often thought of in this light. A survey of Norwegian-Americans in Wisconsin politics, for instance, shows

that the first two Norwegians to be elected to public office were intellectuals who were chosen in 1847 and 1859. In 1850, Norwegians comprised about three per cent of the State's population. From 1861 to 1868 the payroll of the State legislature carried only a doorkeeper and a fireman who were Norwegian. Yet by 1870 four counties were from twenty to forty per cent Norwegian. During the decade after 1868, several Norwegians were elected to State office. One, Knute Nelson, later became a United States Senator from Minnesota.

The first generation is usually poorly represented in political leadership; the second generation is much better represented. In another instance, the Irish immigrants to New York City in the 1800's were given aid and comfort by Tammany Hall; their descendants inherited the organization

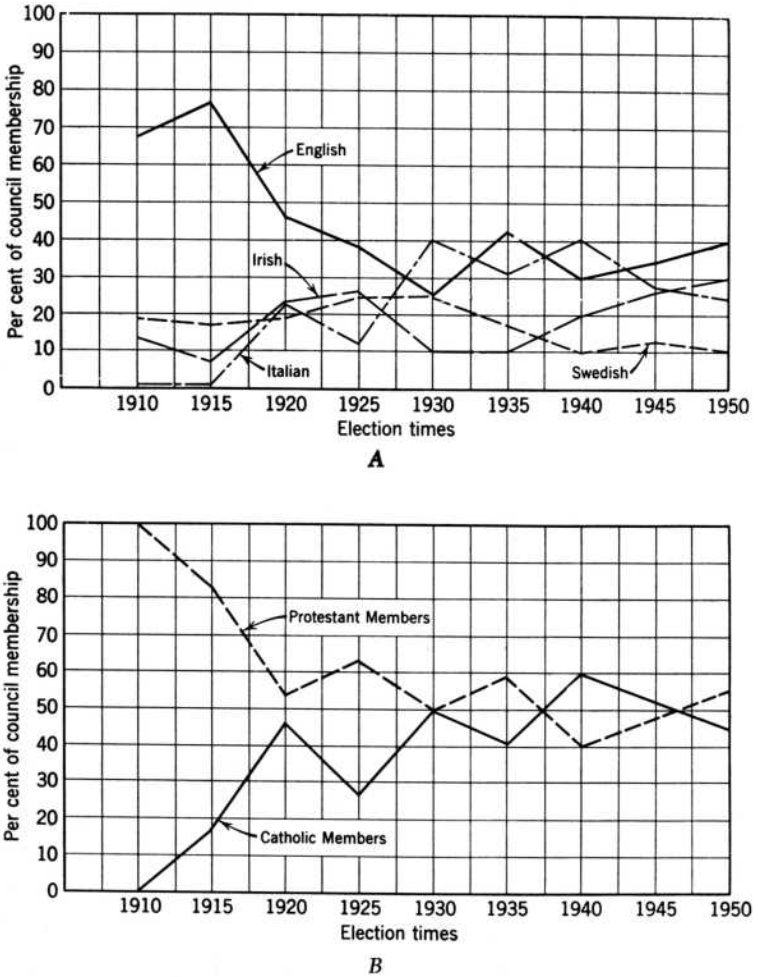

Figure 27. Politics and Social Change in a City, 1910–1950. *A*. Trend of Ethnic Names in the City Council; *B*. Changing Religious Affiliations of City Councilmen. (The city in question is under 50,000 population and located south of Providence, R. I. The Council held 16 members until 1930 and thereafter 20 members.)

itself. By the time of the Civil War, most New York police were Irish, and the Irish were moving from politics into all kinds of businesses that had to do with politics—moving in sidewise, often, as partners, instead of from the bottom. A survey of appointed judgeships in New York City over the last two generations reveals an increase first of Irish, then of Jewish, and finally of Italian, names.

The two graphs in Figure 27 show how members of several principal ethnic strains in a New England town developed political prominence. An equilibrium seems to have recently been established among the national origins of council members. The achievement of such "proportional" representation generally signifies the decline of true ethnic representation in American politics, contrary as it may seem. That is, the index used—the nationality of people's names—comes to lack any real ethnic meaning. Once the point of equilibrium has been reached there is no longer a strong, conscious ethnic drive. As time passes, success itself diminishes the force that originally inspired the drive for political office.

Once the process of political mobility in a group reaches a certain speed it no longer appears to be a group phenomenon but becomes an individual process. The rate of political-economic success of most European immigrant groups will probably within this generation achieve its highest speed and the group itself rapidly vanish as a strong component in individual behavior.

The process is still in its incipient stages, however, among recent groups of Mexican origin in California, of Puerto Ricans in New York, and of Negroes in many areas of the country. Unlike many descendants of the backwoodsmen, Scandinavians, Germans, Irish, Jews, Poles, Italians, Czechs, French, and southerners, who can now afford to ignore the usefulness of party as a means of achieving political, economic, and social security, and who are indeed quite unaware that anything like this had ever happened, these contemporary groups need party politics badly. Through the party, they find jobs, legal aid, advancement of favorable legislation, new prestige as their leaders are elected, and opportunities to rub elbows with better educated, socially sophisticated, economically "smarter" people who, by example and by direct cooperation, show them how to achieve financial, technical, and social success.

PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE OF THE PARTY SYSTEM

The American political party, for all its shapelessness and aimlessness, is an extremely important institution. It works in its own way and on its own terms. It plays a significant part in the lives of as many people as go to church or are baseball fans. Its weak performance of its professed functions, especially when compared with some other parties of the modern world, allows its latent functions to develop all the more freely. The party system can be taken to task for not being something other than it is. But what it is can be clearly comprehended, if one seeks seriously to understand it, and can be stoutly defended on a respectable basis.

Public attitudes toward party differences

What does the American public think of this kind of party system? Do they know that it exists? Are people bitter about it? Would they welcome some alternative party system? Apparently a large part of the public is aware of the nature of the party system. They know what is occurring therein. In a survey in 1952 of a national cross-section of Americans, about half the population saw only minor differences or no differences at all between the parties. They made this judgment, too, in the middle of an exciting presidential election campaign. Less than fifteen per cent of the public believed that many important differences existed between the two major parties.[1] Furthermore, when asked whether they thought it would make a great deal of difference to the country whether the Democrats or the Republicans won the elections, or whether it would not make much difference which side won, one-third of the sample said that it would make no difference. About forty per cent declared that it would make some difference or minor differences. Only twenty-one per cent felt that it would make a great deal of difference who won. A large majority of the American people believe that the parties do not represent sharp alternatives.

Apathy toward "liberal" or labor parties

There is little to suggest that people are bitter about the lack of burning issues or that they would like to demand such issues. Perhaps the best evidence of this comes from asking people whether they would prefer a different kind of party system, one which gave them more to choose from. In five polls of a sample of the American public by the American Institute of Public Opinion, conducted in the years from 1937 to 1947, people were asked whether they would favor giving up the two present major parties for a system with a "liberal" and a "conservative" party. The percentages favoring such a change ranged from twelve per cent to twenty-four per cent. The percentages opposing any such change ranged from fifty-two per cent to seventy-two per cent (the balance had no opinion on the subject and could hardly be considered therefore as favoring such a change). In May, 1946, only ten per cent said that they would join a third, labor party should one be organized. Many people are unclear about what their party stands for (and the fact is that they have good reason for being unclear); few people —perhaps one out of fifty—are interested enough in their party to work a little for it; yet a large majority of present-day Americans are still hesitant to regard any other system as better.

QUESTIONS AND PROBLEMS

1. Name and describe briefly the professed functions of an American political party.
2. Name and describe briefly the latent functions of an American political party.

[1] Analysis by the author of Survey Research Center materials.