The Politics of Tecumseh Corners: Canadian Political Parties as Franchise Organizations

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Presidential Address to the Canadian Political Science Association, Toronto, Ontario, 2002

People who have only witnessed gatherings such as the House of Commons at Westminster and the Senate at Washington and never seen a Conservative Convention at Tecumseh Corners or a Liberal Rally at the Concession school house, don't know what politics means.

> Stephen Leacock—"The Great Election in Missinaba County"

Stephen Leacock's account of the great election in Missinaba County provides a classic analysis of electoral politics in Canada.[1] On the one hand, we are told that this epic contest took place within the context of a major countrywide political battle over reciprocity—would there be, should there be freer trade with the Americans? Leacock reports the question was thrashed out with such a patriotic spirit in Mariposa that "for a month, at least, people talked of nothing else." With the parties squaring off against one another, it appears to have been a straight fight, with voters' long-standing party loyalties interacting with a big

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1 Stephen Leacock, "The Great Election in Missinaba County," in his *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989 [1912]). Leacock concludes his account of the election in "The Candidacy of Mr. Smith" in the same volume.

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national issue to shape the outcome. However, there is a second story line. It emphasizes the realities of the immediate world of Mariposa, Tecumseh Corners and the concession lines defining the rest of the county. That face of the election contest reveals the struggle by an established incumbent to hold his seat against an unexpected challenger. In it we see the sitting member actively sponsor an independent candidate in the hopes of splitting the opposition's vote, politicians eagerly agreeing with those on both sides of the dominant issue, casual manipulation of the local communication networks, and sophisticated vote mobilization strategies by election-day campaign organizations. At the end of the count, the insurgent Conservative candidate, Josh Smith, emerged victorious, defeating John Henry Bagshaw, the sitting Liberal MP.

In this case study, all of André Siegfried's four ''arguments that tell'' in Canadian elections are at work, but the most powerful are the impulses of local advantage and the appeals of national party as defined by their leaders.[2] We see the interplay of skillful politicians, both inciting and responding to local prejudices and interests as they struggle for position. Despite 20 years of service as the incumbent, and enough resources to surreptitiously fund a third candidate, Bagshaw was outmanoeuvred by Smith's campaign which told local electors what they wanted to hear, and then managed its voter turnout machine with military precision. Writing before the behavioural revolution, Leacock does not give us the final vote counts, for Tecumseh Corners or any other polling place in the county, but we know elections in the East Simcoe ridings of this period were won by only a few hundred votes, so it seems plausible that Smith's local campaign made the difference. Nevertheless, this activity was all structured by enduring national political parties, whose traditions and claims on the loyalties of the voters shaped the politics of the county. Perhaps, then, the real story is the Conservative party's decision to oppose the Liberal's reciprocity initiative, and the Tory candidates' subsequent sweep across the province. If that is the case, then all the planning and efforts of the local activists may have made no difference to the outcome. Perhaps Bagshaw, as he feared, was doomed from the moment his party leaders decided to fight the election over the tariff.

However they read this, most ordinary observers find the story deeply satisfying for it embraces both sides of a political world so familiar to the Canadian style and practice of single-member constituency politics. Political scientists, however, seem more inclined to resist Leacock's seductive pen. They are apt to ask: What is really

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2   André Siegfried, *The Race Question in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966 [1906]).

Abstract. Canadian political parties are charged with aggregating the interests of a diverse and changing electorate in order to balance particularistic local demands with general national interests. This article asks what kind of organizations have they adopted to do this? How does their organizational character shape their capacities and their practices? The argument outlines a franchise organization model and explores the extent to which it can be used to explain Canadian party behaviour. The article exploits this model to analyze questions of party membership, the place of incumbents, leadership and electoral organization as they are played out in Canadian politics.

Résumé. Les partis politiques canadiens sont chargés d'agréger les intérêts d'un électorat divers et changeant afin d'équilibrer les demandes locales particulières à des intérêts nationaux généraux. Cet article cherche à faire ressortir le genre de structures organisationnelles que les partis politiques ont adoptées à cette fin, de même que la façon dont ces structures ont modelé les capacités et les pratiques des partis. L'argument mis de l'avant dans cet article décrit un modèle d'organisation sous forme de concession et il explore en quoi ce modèle peut être utile pour expliquer le comportement des partis politiques canadiens. En outre, l'auteur utilise ce modèle pour analyser la question de l'adhésion aux partis, la place des titulaires, le leadership et l'organisation électorale propres au contexte canadien.

going on here? Did candidate Smith win, or did the Liberal party lose? Can we measure the relative contributions of leaders, parties and candidates to the election results? Perhaps not surprisingly, there is comparatively little agreement on these questions. Those in the election study business use their data from rich national surveys to demonstrate that electoral success or failure is tied to parties' capacity to mobilize support around the defining issues of national campaigns. They would say Bagshaw was a goner, destined to be swept away in an anti-reciprocity party vote. Those who study constituency-level organizations argue that their evidence indicates that local campaigns often develop their own idiosyncratic issues, that riding associations depend on the energies and resources of self-starting local notables like Josh Smith, and that parties prosper as a function of their constituency organizations' efforts.[3] So, we are left with a picture of Canadian parties as organizations that have a distinct and lively existence in both national and local political worlds. But what kind of organizations are these? How, if at all, do they attach the politics of Tecumseh Corners to those of every other corner in the country?

These are not merely questions for political scientists to ponder

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3 On national campaigns, see the path-breaking study of the 1988 general election by Richard Johnston, André Blais, Henry Brady and Jean Crête, *Letting the People Decide: Dynamics of a Canadian Election* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press: 1992). For accounts drawn from the local level, see John Meisel, ed., *Papers on the 1962 Election* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), and Anthony Sayers, *Parties, Candidates, and Constituency Campaigns in Canadian Elections* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999). Fred Cutler has begun to bring these two dimensions of electoral analysis together in his ''Local Economies, Local Policy Impacts and Federal Electoral Behaviour in Canada,'' this JOURNAL 35 (2002), 347-82.

on sleepy afternoons in the Mariposa sun. Political parties have been described, in John Meisel's words, as ''among the relatively few genuinely national forces in Canada'' with their success at brokering the competing claims of the country as essential to the nation's well being.[4] This is no small task in a country in which, more often than not, the forces of cultural difference trump the claims of class, the appeals of community override the demands of society, and the imperatives of geography overwhelm the lessons of history. Despite their perceived centrality to the democratic process, or their theoretical import for national unity, we know little about how Canadian parties actually work. Conventional wisdom says the classic Canadian party acts as a broker, presenting policy packages that accommodate the competing claims of different regions, communities and groups. In a word, national parties are to succeed by aggregating, rather than articulating, interests. This, of course, sets them off from the cleavage-based parties of most other democracies whose very raison d'être is to articulate the claims of their distinctive clienteles. It suggests that Canadian parties will be very different kinds of organizations, and that they will practise their own, unique style of politics.

Of course, parties can succeed, but not win, in Canada by appealing to more narrowly based interests along one of the many cleavage lines dividing Canadians. Given the territorial cast of the electoral system, the easiest way to do this is by playing to regional discontents. And the history of the party system has been marked by the ebb and flow of such parties. They have typically arisen when an overreaching national party collapsed under the strain of trying to accommodate the conflicting demands of too many interests gathered onto a political omnibus. It is no coincidence that each of the great party system crises in Canadian history occurred in the wake of the disintegration of the oversized party coalitions assembled by Robert Borden, John Diefenbaker and then Brian Mulroney. This suggests that if Canada's successful brokerage parties are catch-all parties, they have to be careful not to actually catch all the interests, or embrace all the Tecumseh Corners, clamoring for their care and attention.

But why should this be? Leon Epstein provided an answer years ago in a perceptive essay comparing Canadian and American parties.[5] He noted that political parties in both countries faced the same challenge of representing the diverse interests of geographically sprawling, socially plural, economically disparate, politically federal, mobile and open, new-world electorates through a similar single-member plurality

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4 John Meisel, ''The Stalled Omnibus: Canadian Parties in the 1960s,'' *Social Research* 30 (1963), 370.
5 Leon Epstein, ''A Comparative Study of Canadian Parties,'' *American Political Science Review*, 58 (1964), 46-57.

electoral system. However, while the party system in the United States managed to contain all its diversity in two parties, the smaller Canada produced a multi-party system. The reason, Epstein argued, is to be found in the systems of government and more particularly in the distinctive demands for discipline each makes on their respective parties. American parties need be disciplined on questions of office but not policy; in Canada, parties with a bent for majority government must be disciplined on both. Parliamentary norms call for a level of party discipline on policy and programme questions that simply make it impossible to contain all of the country's political diversity within two parties. Consequently, regions that feel neglected, and groups who think their interests are not being articulated, find themselves drawn to build and support new parties.

This dynamic defines the balancing act required of governing parties in Canada. They must construct a political tent large and shapeless enough to encompass the inchoate coalitions of supporters they need, but not so big as to explode, leaving a more fragmented system. The great Conservative party collapses of 1921, 1962-1963 and 1993 all produced just such a turning point.[6] Each produced a new wave of third-party growth and increased the fragmentation of party and electoral politics. Yet, with each cycle of the party system wheel, the brokerage balancing act became more difficult as the size and breadth of the new governing party's base narrowed.[7] And, with fewer corners of the country finding a place in the dominant coalition, popular confidence in politicians and their parties declined. More than ever, parties have come to depend upon the electoral system to deliver them parliamentary majorities. Yet, these majorities provide the very reason, and means, to create and sustain such broad-based brokerage parties. Without them, disciplined national parties might well dissolve.

In Leacock's years, Canadian parties depended upon the time-honoured bonds of government patronage and inherited party identifications to organize and maintain their accommodative coalitions. His account of the Missinaba battle is full of both: voters scrambling for government contracts and preferment while respecting the divisions created by their friends and associates' party loyalties. Voters at the concession school house might not have always agreed with their party, but they knew

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6 Each of these governments came to power in a landslide victory over the Liberals. The argument here is that it was the very oversized cast to their victories that contributed to the Conservatives' undoing.

7 For a discussion of the governing party's base in successive party systems, see R. K. Carty, "On the Road Again: 'The Stalled Omnibus' Revisited," in C. E. S. Franks, et al., eds., *Canada's Century: Governance in a Maturing Society, Essays in Honour of John Meisel* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), passim.

whose side they were on, and who buttered it. That is no longer true. Patronage largely disappeared as a principal organizational instrument of national parties thanks to the reforming impulses of the Borden government during the First World War.[8] Party loyalties persisted longer, but they too have slowly, but surely, declined as a major tool for party-builders. Immigration has added a higher proportion of voters with no established party ties to the electorate than in any other established democracy, and the separation of federal and provincial party systems divided individuals' party frames, so that the proportion of the electorate with consistent, strong and long-standing party identifications has steadily eroded over recent decades.[9] What is true of voters is also true for activists. Party members and political actors are hardly bound by life-time partisan commitments, crossing party lines with remarkable ease and frequency.[10] Canadian parties now must cope with a political world in which, to borrow Albert Hirschman's terms, exit trumps voice, and voice trumps loyalty.[11] In this situation, trying to assemble and keep together a party that can successfully broker the demands of Tecumseh Corners, Telegraph Creek, Témiscamingue, Toronto and many dozen other places unlike them, is no easy matter.

Two further realities of Canadian political life compound the problem for the country's party-builders. First, the existence of both separate and distinct patterns of political competition in the provinces means that there are limited ties between the partisan shape, and hence the party organizations, of federal and provincial politics. With activists and voters living in ''two political worlds,'' the energies, resources and loyalties needed to sustain party life are fragmented and divided.[12] And given that Canadian parties are not engaged in the politics of local government, their organizational roots in the communities they need to mobilize are inevitably weaker than those of parties in most other democracies.

A second obstacle to party-builders, though one not unique to

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8   John English, *The Decline of Politics: The Conservative Party and the Party System 1901-20* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).

9   Harold Clark and Allan Kornberg ''Evaluations and Evolution: Public Attitudes towards Federal Political Parties, 1965-1991,'' this JOURNAL 26 (1993), 287-312.

10 R. K. Carty, ''For the Third Asking: Is there a Future for National Political Parties?'' in Tom Kent, ed., *In Pursuit of the Public Good: Essays in Honour of Allan J. MacEachen* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 149-50.

11 Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

12 The phrase is Don Blake's. See his *Two Political Worlds: Parties and Voting in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985). In some jurisdictions (for example, Ontario) this separation is enforced by law that makes the transfer of funds between provincial and federal party organizations illegal.

Canada, flows from its binational, multicultural character. A century ago, Siegfried rightly noted that Canada's central political fact was its English-French cultural duality and this has hardly changed since. This means that genuinely national parties must have two distinctive organizations capable of appealing and responding to the country's two major language groups. Keeping them on the same page of the same hymnbook is not always an easy matter. Today, the growing multicultural cast of the electorate means that in large numbers of constituencies much of the population is drawn from other distinctive ethno-cultural communities.[13] Given the volatility of the electorate, and the small margins by which many districts are won, the parties must have local organizations capable of operating in the wide variety of language and cultural mixes they find in the corners of their constituencies. Nothing in this facilitates standard, centralized norms and practices.

To summarize the problem: Canadian parties must find ways to encompass a large, diverse and shifting coalition of supporters, who are animated by the often conflicting interests and demands of their distinctive communities, regions and cultural groups. They must do this with comparatively little in the way of the material or ideational glue that traditionally holds political parties together,[14] and they must do it in a manner and language that can be heard in all corners of the country. The conventional model of a centralized, disciplined mass membership party, speaking with one voice, and committed to offering and delivering an integrated and coherent set of public policies, has never been the way to do this successfully. If we are to understand our political parties, and the character of democratic politics they engender, we need to ask: what kind of organization do they use to connect Tecumseh Corners with the House of Commons in Ottawa? How do such parties work? What are the consequences of the particular organizational model for our political life?

The discussion that follows seeks to answer these questions. First, I outline the essence of a franchise model for sprawling organizations, highlighting some of their advantages and limitations, and arguing that we should think about Canadian parties as franchise systems. This leads to a re-analysis of some of the basic features and practices of Canadian party organizations, and understandings of how and why they work as they do. Finally, the article concludes with a

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13   In one quarter of contemporary electoral districts at least 10 per cent of the population speaks something other than one of the two official languages at home.

14   Leaders, especially when in power, do have significant patronage resources that strengthen their control over central party activity. Here, I am referring to the extensive patronage once used to attract and hold ordinary party members as described in English (*The Decline of Politics*).

discussion of the consequences for Canadian politics of the parties having adopted a franchise model as the dominant mode for linking a new-world society to its old-world state institutions.

Parties as Franchise Organizations

The central linkage problem for Canadian parties is to respond to the imperatives of a competitive national system while incorporating the demands and energies of parochial supporters. The solution is an organizational form that best accommodates those tensions. Franchise systems are designed to do just that. They exist to maximize the efficiencies of scale and standardization while exploiting the advantages of local participation in the operation and delivery of an organization's product. Typically, a central organization operating under an established brand determines the products and sets standards for their production and labelling; designs and manages mass marketing and advertising strategies; and provides management help and training while arranging for the basic supplies needed by local outlets. For their part, individual franchises exist to deliver the product to a particular market. To do so, they invest local resources, both capital and personnel, in building an organization attuned to the needs and demands of the community they serve, and they are preoccupied with delivering the product to their market area. In expansive systems, there may be a range of intermediary organizational units designed both to carry out specialized functions and to mitigate the inherent tensions between the centre and the individual franchises' mutual, but oft competing, interests.

The relationships between a central organization and its local franchises can vary enormously, and indeed need not be the same for each individual franchise within a single organization. Large, rich or important units may well have a level of independence and power not shared by smaller or less vital outlets, while others may be fully owned by the central organization itself. Franchise systems can be centralized, decentralized or federalized, depending upon the efficiencies and/or philosophies of the organization and, inevitably, there will be friction between the parts as each tries to influence the other to its advantage. To structure the relationship, and institutionalize the rules ordering the system, detailed franchise contracts spelling out the rights, responsibilities and obligations of each guarantee their autonomy and mutual interdependence. They ensure that the central office can penalize a local affiliate if it fails to meet the organization's standards; it also provides mechanisms for local units to hold the central organization to its policies and responsibilities.

In principle, franchise organizations are more flexible and adaptable than monolithic, bureaucratic organizations. They have the advantage of producing a reliable, identifiable product which consumers can

count on, a centrally planned communication programme that ensures they are delivering the appropriate and desired message to their clients, and a leadership free to make decisions about product lines or target markets. In addition, they also have the advantage of attracting local investment, generating a set of grass-roots participants with an incentive to build and maintain an effective organization. These local partners will be more attuned to the immediate community's perspectives, practices and demands than those in a remote headquarters, an advantage in attracting support in a volatile and competitive environment. Individual franchises can also test-market product innovations and delivery services, providing valuable ground-level feedback to the centre.

This model has been successful in a wide variety of industries and activities, providing goods and services to mass publics across national and international space. Organizations such as Canadian Tire, General Motors and McDonalds have managed to penetrate different communities and societies offering a standard product line, varied around the edges to satisfy local sensibilities (Lobsterburgers in Nova Scotia, Dr. Pepper soft drinks in Texas). Their franchise operators locate, build and operate outlets designed to capture consumers in communities they know well. Not all individual franchises are the same (some are unionized, others not), nor do all have the same relationship with the company (which for some changes over time), but thanks to a consistent labeling and advertising programme all are part of an easily recognizable organization whose brand offers an essentially familiar product to a mass public.[15]

Without stretching the analogy too far, or suggesting that parties are nothing more than the political equivalent of a hardware or hamburger chain, it is possible to recognize in the franchise model a framework for analyzing and interpreting the organization and operation of modern political parties. Their central organizations are typically responsible for providing the basic product line—policy and leadership; for devising and directing the major communication line and appeal—the national campaign; and for establishing standard organizational management, training and financing functions. In office, the central party plays the dominant part in any governance responsibilities the party assumes. Local units, however they are defined (geographically or otherwise), more often provide the basic organizational home for most individual members, and are normally charged with delivering the product by creating organizations that can

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15 I am indebted to Laurie Thorlakson for her suggestions on distinguishing between brands and products, and to John Meisel for his comments on the importance of the branding activity.

find and support candidates as well as mounting campaigns to mobilize the vote on election day. Intermediary and specialized entities can support these activities, but all units must recognize their part and accept their defined power and role trade-offs as a necessary part of the bargain required to make the party, as a whole, successful.

This simple framework provides for the functional autonomy of the organizational elements that exist within parties, while still leaving considerable room for variation between and within parties in terms of the relationships among their units, or in the locus of particular activities. It does not proscribe any particular balance of forces or pattern of influence in a party. Quite different solutions to the problems of policy development or personnel recruitment can be institutionalized in parties structured in franchise terms. In one, local organizations might play a decisive role in candidate selection processes, while in others that power could be reserved for a different level of the party machine. The role of members, and so the incentives to membership, can vary considerably depending upon the level at which individual members are attached to the party, and what part they are assigned in the life of those units. Where professionally supported national leadership roles are separated from local mobilization efforts, the party in office might dominate policy-making activity leaving local franchises free to manage the politics of the grass roots. In an environment of declining levels of party identification,[16] that will allow the relatively autonomous elements of a franchise party to pursue an increasingly available electorate in ways that are independent, yet compatible, with one another.

We need not be concerned here to put a franchise model in developmental perspective, asking whether such party structures are the natural evolution of classic cadre parties, the remnants of depopulated mass parties, or the efficient form of catch-all or electoral-professional party machines. The issue of how this structural option operates is distinct from the question of its historical generation: some parties will have come to it later, or by different routes, than others. The critical point is that it provides a framework for analyzing and understanding the internal dynamics and consequences of parties' organizational responses to their linkage challenges. It points to the questions of how party units are linked together, how they manage to institutionalize particular relationships of both dependence and autonomy, and how their leaders and members operate the system. Let us consider Canadian parties in these terms.

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16   Russell J. Dalton, "The Decline of Party Identifications," in Russell J. Dalton and Martin P. Wattenberg, eds., *Parties without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 19-36.

Canadian Parties as Franchise Systems

As organizations whose primary vocation is electoral, Canadian parties are inevitably shaped by the electoral system. And Canadians have been among the least willing of peoples to experiment with their electoral machinery, content to maintain an inherited nineteenth-century single-member plurality system. It is a regime most amenable to the forces of Tecumseh Corners localism that underlie and reinforce the politics of geography that has always come so instinctively, and so easily, to the country's voters and politicians. In comparison to many other democracies, the law has left political parties pretty much alone as unregulated private organizations, so that they have developed with few formal constraints. Responding to the incentives of this framework, Canadian parties make electoral district associations their basic organizational unit. The other fundamental element of the party is the parliamentary caucus dominated and managed by its head who is recognized as the undisputed party leader.[17] There are a variety of intermediary organizational elements—provincial and national executives, delegated conventions, councils of local executives, national staff etc.—but they are, with a significant exception for leadership selection, of secondary importance. Party bureaucracies and bureaucrats (Katz and Mair's "party in central office"[18]) are not the third partners in Canada's party organizations that they are in most other party democracies.

At the heart of Canadian parties' structural arrangement is a bargain that governs the relationship between these two fundamental organizational elements. It is the essence of the franchise contract that defines the parties, and can be characterized simply as "local autonomy for national discipline."[19] The parliamentary party provides the leadership who effectively set public policy; the constituency associations provide the forum for members' political participation with the power to control riding activity and the right to support party candidates that they choose. Both sides recognize the limits of their place in this structure and find ways to accommodate themselves to it.

At their centre, Canadian parties are focused on the leadership of the parliamentary caucus that commands strict discipline of its members. Whatever the views of members of parliament, or the local bases of their support, they are expected to back their leader's positions and

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17 This is not to say the leadership is not disputed. Its very power makes it a focus of considerable intra-party conflict. On this more below.

18 Richard Katz and Peter Mair, "The Evolution of Party Organizations in Europe: Three Faces of Party Organization," *American Review of Politics* 14 (1993), 593-617.

19 Carty, "For the Third Asking," 148.

loyally toe the party line. Though closed caucus meetings provide an occasion for discussion of policy and tactics, there seems little doubt that members are the lobby fodder for a disciplined parliamentary machine. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Siegfried observed that Canadian party leaders personified their party, determining and articulating policy, and their pre-eminent position has only strengthened since.[20] Though Canadian parties have regular policy conventions, filled with delegates from local associations, the products of those meetings do little more than indicate the general tenor of the party's ambition. The leadership has always felt free to adopt or mold them as it sees fit, in parliamentary manoeuvring or in writing electoral manifestos. And electoral manifestos themselves are hardly sacrosanct. Governing party leaders feel quite unconstrained by them and are even free to push for policies they campaigned against, secure in the knowledge their backbenchers will sustain them.

Party leaders have full control of their organization's national staff and the campaign teams put in place to fight elections. Through them, the leadership is able to define and communicate its message as it appeals for support. This ensures a centrally determined marketing plan for the party's products—its leadership and policies—through the marriage of opinion polling and television advertising.[21] In none of these activities do ordinary party members, or other party units, have any significant decision-making power. However, while the centre dominates its national partisan world, it depends upon a set of autonomous local associations in the constituencies to deliver the votes needed for electoral success.

Canadian parties strive to have a presence in each electoral district, in part to establish and legitimate their national vocation, but mainly to enrol and activate members, find candidates and mobilize support on their behalf. The franchise arrangement gives the parties' riding associations almost complete autonomy in managing these local tasks. Constituency associations, run by whatever volunteers the party is able to attract locally, are generally quiescent in inter-election periods, focusing mainly on routine organizational maintenance, supplying delegates to national party gatherings and occasional social events.[22] During elections, they become very active: members meet to choose a candidate in an open public meeting, and supporters are

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20　Siegfried, *The Race Question in Canada*, 136.
21　Such centralized national planning may, of course, call for regionally specific and socially segmented advertising strategies. On this, see R. K. Carty, William Cross and Lisa Young *Rebuilding Canadian Party Politics* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), chap. 9.
22　R. K. Carty, *Canadian Political Parties in the Constituencies* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991), 55-65.

mobilized to create and operate the necessary local campaign organization. The right of the local association to designate their candidate is longstanding and jealously guarded. Sitting MPs must be renominated by their association, and every election sees some unseated by riding partisans for what are usually local, idiosyncratic reasons. The party leadership has a strong interest in the make-up of its parliamentary caucus and tries to influence the process where it can, but for the most part accepts the right of members to choose a candidate who will represent local interests.[23] This reinforces the parochial cast of local party associations and ensures that they continue to transmit profoundly local impulses into the system.

Most franchise systems sustain local outlets only where there is a significant market for their products. For their part, Canadian parties in an attempt to be instruments of national aggregation, sponsor local branches even in areas of limited demand, although in the 2000 general election only one of them—the Liberals—was able to mount even a token presence in every riding.[24] National parties are dependent for their local existence on whomever they can mobilize and hold in a constituency. As parties of aggregation, with organizations peopled by volunteers, they often find themselves with little capacity to discipline their local associations, for their activists always have exit as a viable political option. It also means that some local constituency parties exist in politically hostile or indifferent communities as little more than paper organizations with no real human existence. The result is an enormous variation in organization, strength and activity across the parties: successful local branches are often vigorous, rich and rudely independent, others linger as fictional entries on a headquarters list.[25] Local autonomy also carries with it considerable freedom for these varied local associations to set their own norms and practices. This works against any easy ability of the parties to impose consistent or

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23　The leadership has the legal power to veto candidates, and in some parties the power to impose candidates on local associations, but these practices are neither widespread nor particularly successful. The Liberal party has, in the last decade, been more proactive in trying to influence local candidate selections through a variety of indirect as well as direct means, but even in it the norm of local autonomy remains widespread and powerful. For a discussion of nomination practices see Carty et al., *Rebuilding*, 160-171.

24　It became standard practice for all the constituencies to be contested by both major parties only in the 1960s. The election in 2000 marked the first time since the onset of the third Canadian party system that only one managed to do so.

25　This has been characteristic of most New Democratic party associations in Quebec. In responding to a 1991 survey conducted for the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (Carty, *Parties in the Constituencies*), one NDP respondent freely admitted there really was no local association in the district and his name remained on the party contact list only so they would have someone to deal with when an election was called.

uniform standards for their own internal activities, leaving Canadian parties among the most heterogeneous of political organizations.

The Politics of Franchise Parties

It is a long way from the party politics of Tecumseh Corners to those in Ottawa. If the franchise structure helps bridge the gap, it does so at the cost of perpetuating the divide and reinforcing the peculiarities of party life and organization in the more than 300 constituencies of the country. It also explains much about the nature and workings of Canadian parties.

Party Membership

Let us start with the nature of Canadian party membership, for the place of members and activists in political parties takes us to the heart of typologies of party organization and activity. Maurice Duverger rooted his famous distinction between cadre and mass parties in terms of a parties' membership structure,[26] and classic arguments about an organizational contagion from the left were cast very much in terms of old cadre parties building memberships that resembled their mass party opponents. While some accounts of modern parties as electoral-professional networks appear to denigrate the role of individual members, research by a number of scholars in several countries points to their importance in sustaining organizations and mobilizing support.[27]

In Canadian parties, membership is principally vested in, and exercised through, independent constituency associations that influence the rules and practices governing membership in their area. For the most part, membership is open with virtually no demands made upon members. Though there are some pressures to standardization, the parties tolerate a good deal of internal difference in the name of local or regional autonomy. For instance, there are about 130,000 Liberals on the party books in New Brunswick, but only just 10,000 in neighbouring Nova Scotia. The difference does not indicate the comparative strength of the party in the two provinces; it reflects distinctly different approaches to membership that carry with them significant consequences for party organization and decision making.

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26   Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties* (London: Methuen, 1964).
27   For significant studies see Susan Scarrow, *Parties and Their Members* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley, *Labour's Grass Roots: The Politics of Party Membership* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Paul Whiteley, Patrick Seyd and Jeremy Richardson, *True Blues: The Politics of Conservative Party Membership* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); and Michael Gallagher and Michael Marsh, *Days of Blue Loyalty: The Politics of Membership of the Fine Gael Party* (Dublin: PSAI Press, 2002).

Being rooted in local associations, whose primary responsibilities under the franchise agreement are with personnel, not policy, members have real decision-making power since they have direct votes in candidate and leadership selections. Membership bestows a vote in party elections, and, in effect, party membership fees are a poll tax that admits anyone to the ballot box. With membership in local associations carrying little other instrumental value, many members join only in order to participate in what are essentially party primaries, so that membership patterns echo electoral cycles. While each local party franchise reflects the idiosyncrasies of political life in its electoral district, constituency association size typically doubles in an election year but then soon reverts to the pre-election level.[28] And in recent leadership contests, party memberships have grown by 300-400 per cent only to fall back quickly.[29] Not surprisingly, fluctuations are much greater when elections are contested. For example, in 1988, membership in local associations of the governing Conservative party grew by 284 per cent in cases where the nomination was contested, but by only 70 per cent where it was not; the corresponding figures in 1993 were 257 per cent and 34 per cent.[30]

These sharp oscillations in membership numbers are peculiar to Canadian parties. They reflect the reality that large numbers of "instant members" (as they are known) are simply recruited into local associations by individual candidates who want their vote in a party contest.[31] Focused on the event, rather than committed to the organization, most let their membership lapse after it is over. Those who supported a losing candidate are most likely to leave, those who supported the winner more likely to stay. In this way, party's memberships are continually being transformed. To a hard core of loyalists is added a cadre of new members willing to support the party through their support for the person who enlisted them. And candidates who go on to win public election are more likely to hold these new recruits in their constituency party organizations than are losers. This explains why local associations headed by incumbent MPs are typically several times larger than others in the same party or others in the same riding.[32]

28   Carty, *Parties in the Constituencies*, 36-39; and Carty, et al., *Rebuilding*, 157-60.

29   David Stewart and R. K. Carty, "Leadership Politics as Party Building: The Conservatives in 1998," in W. Cross, ed., *Political Parties, Representation and Electoral Democracy in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2002) 55-67.

30   R. K. Carty, "Canadian Parties as Membership Organizations," a paper for the Conference on "Party Membership in Western Democracies," Bologna, 1996.

31   In the mobilization drives that characterize party contests, membership fees are often paid by candidates' organizations anxious to recruit members. To the extent that the fee is little more than a poll tax, this may be one of the few cases where candidates rather than voters pay such taxes.

32   Carty, *Parties in the Constituencies*, 39-42

Three distinctive features of Canadian party membership follow from this cyclical dynamic. First, it is difficult to identify just who constitutes a party's membership. In the inter-election period about 2 per cent of the population maintain memberships and sustain the local associations of the national parties.[33] Recent data suggest that this group is elderly, predominantly male and often long-serving,[34] but they only constitute a fraction of those holding memberships during election years. Election period mobilizations flood associations with a very different cross-section of the electorate, often with different interests than the regulars, who then go on to make the party's critical personnel decisions. The franchise structure provides for a good deal of flexibility and variation within parties across their constituency associations as they seek to maximize grass-roots support. However, it ought to be recognized that these parties are essentially simply managing a crude, unregulated primary process thinly disguised as membership decision making. Candidate and leadership selections in this context become political ''happenings'' rather than the considered decision of an ongoing organization accountable to a recognizable membership.

Second, this pattern leads to party memberships that are highly personalized. Many members are initially mobilized in order to support a particular candidate and many of those who remain do so in order to continue to support that individual. The result is the party's franchises are easily dominated by their local notables, though their very openness means that outsiders can easily mobilize their friends and neighbours to take them over. Associations that do not manage to elect their candidate shrink and become comparatively inactive. Personalized, as opposed to institutional, loyalties do not make for particularly enduring memberships or stable organizations, a problem which is exacerbated by the short career spans of most Canadian parliamentarians.

A third significant element of party membership is that it takes on a locally distinctive cast, reflecting not only the peculiarities of the individual constituency, but also those who have been mobilized from within it. Memberships are defined in considerable part by the activities of the often self-starting political entrepreneurs who may need to find ways to recruit hundreds, even thousands, quickly when an elec-

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33 Recall that the federal and provincial party organizations are separate (in most parties, in most parts of the country). Total membership numbers are generally higher in the provincial parties and even allowing for individuals belonging to parties at both levels (though not always the same one) the proportion of Canadians who are party members is likely only about twice this.

34 William Cross and Lisa Young are completing a major study of Canadian party members. See their ''The Contours of Political Party Membership in Canada,'' *Party Politics*, forthcoming.

toral contest is declared. The easiest way to do this is to mobilize members already in groups—co-religionists, members of one's ethnic community, fellow workers and so forth—with the result that associations can easily end up being left in the hands of one specific group within the community. Thus, individuals drawn from one ethnically distinct community of new Canadians can dominate a suburban party association while those opposed to immigration control the association in a nearby riding. The same groups may well control associations in other parties in other electoral districts, or in different provincial parties in the same community. The result is a hodge-podge membership pattern that denies the wider party much coherence. This is a strength of the franchise arrangement. It allows parties to be responsive to the local communities as they seek to aggregate the claims of a complex and plural society, and it ensures that their local campaigns will touch on local issues and speak to the constituency's electorate in the language(s) they use.

This pattern of party membership, with its regular electoral cycles of surge and decline, its reluctance to make any demands upon those who join, and its deliberate heterogeneity stands in sharp contrast with the classic portraits of mass party structure and organization. Yet, it is one that suits Canadian parties: it leaves leaders relatively unencumbered in making the policy choices they feel necessary; it gives their members some real decision-making authority over matters close to them; it focuses membership around electoral imperatives; and it maximizes the parties' capacity to respond to the enormous socio-economic, cultural and linguistic diversity that marks the continually changing electorate.

The Place of Incumbents

The electoral system of single-member districts means that each corner of the country has only one representative, and MPs come to be local political monopolists, providing the constituency's voice heard in party and government between elections. Yet, as Leacock's portrait of Missinaba's John Henry Bagshaw reminds us, incumbent politicians have always occupied something of an ambivalent place in Canadian party politics. On the one hand, they have long been treated as trained seals on Parliament Hill, expected to support in unquestioning fashion the dictates of their party leadership and run on whatever policies the leader favours. On the other, they have bestrode their constituencies as dominant figures, often managing the local association and directing its politics as if it were all their private enterprise. This dualism is a natural concomitant of the basic franchise structure of party organization.

The personalized character of party membership means that incumbents' local associations are typically larger and better financed

than are those of others. This gives them a natural advantage in intra-party struggles, including the renomination contests to which they are subjected, and in electoral competition with candidates from opposing parties. From their perspective, this is just as well: the openness of party membership leaves them vulnerable to internal challenges, and the volatility of the electorate means few command a safe seat. From the parties' perspective, strong local incumbents are a mixed blessing. By allowing Tecumseh Corners Conservatives to send their own champion to Ottawa, the party maximizes its chances of capturing and then holding the riding, but it must then be prepared to work with whomever is chosen, no matter their skills, proclivities or views. It also leaves the party overly dependent upon the political abilities and personal networks of its incumbents. There is in this franchise bargain too little opportunity for the party to institutionalize an independent existence of its own. When incumbents leave, much of the party membership and organization in the constituency will go with them and then it must be rebuilt by and around whoever manages to seize control of the association.

Party Leadership

Canadian parties have always been extraordinarily leader-focused with leaders playing a critical linkage role at the centre of the franchise organization. Dominating their parliamentary caucus, leaders command disciplined support as they articulate and shape their respective party's national policy and strategy. For much of the twentieth century, conventions peopled by delegates from local party units selected the leaders, but those indirect processes have now given way to mechanisms that give every member a direct vote.[35] This has enhanced the power of ordinary members by giving them an immediate role in both local association and national party decision making. It has also freed leaders from direct accountability to institutionalized party units, leaving them as comparatively independent actors in the internal dynamics of parties' organizational life.

This evolution in the role of local partisans on leadership questions parallels their relationship with constituency association candidates and is evidence of the extensive authority of the membership on personnel questions. It stands in sharp contrast to their relatively trivial

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35 William Cross, ''Direct Election of Provincial Party Leaders, 1985-1995: The End of the Delegate Convention,'' this JOURNAL 29 (1996), 295-315; R. K. Carty and Donald Blake, ''The Adoption of Membership Votes for Choosing Party Leaders,'' *Party Politics* 5 (1999), 211-24; and Stewart and Carty, ''Leadership Politics as Party Building.''

impact in the parties' policy-making councils.[36] The result is that party members, from riding grass-roots activists right up through the caucus politicians, know that changing party policy or electoral direction is not done by getting resolutions passed in party conventions, or promises inserted into electoral manifestos. Significant change is best brought about by engineering a change in personnel, especially in the party leadership.[37] This ensures that substantial policy disputes in Canadian parties are naturally transformed into leadership conflicts, a pattern especially endemic in parties anxious to find an electorally winning position. With policy disputes often disguised as personnel conflicts, the study of nomination and leadership politics provides an important window on the dynamics of ideological and policy debate in Canadian parties.

The rules of Canadian parties' leadership politics push competition down into the autonomous local associations with their idiosyncratic memberships and particularistic preoccupations. This forces nationally ambitious politicians to build and finance highly personalized networks, capable of penetrating far-flung, disconnected party units to mobilize supporters, leaving parties with a membership organized around complex and overlapping sets of local and personal loyalties. The result leaves the parties honeycombed by a set of personal factions organized around would-be leaders. That winners need to reward their supporters with key party positions, often to the exclusion of those they have defeated, only works to perpetuate internal division and conflict.

Leadership in these parties is at once strong and fragile. Leaders have enormous command over the policy and parliamentary life of their parties. They appoint and direct all the key members of the organization's central office and staff, become the focus of electoral campaigns, and dominate media attention in inter-election periods. At the same time, they must satisfy the expectations of their supporters that are heavily defined in terms of popular successes. Failure to meet expectations can quickly lead to attacks on the leader, launched from within the caucus (whose support a leader must realistically maintain) and/or from members and activists in the dispersed and divergent constituency associations. That members and parliamentarians do not always agree on what is desirable or possible only makes a leader's balancing act more difficult. It is this dynamic of a strong but fragile

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36 Parties that have never been in government have given members a more direct role in determining policy but this influence often evaporates on coming to office.

37 George C. Perlin, *The Tory Syndrome: Leadership Politics in the Progressive Conservative Party* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980). Perlin suggests that this syndrome is most common in opposition parties but, as the Liberals demonstrated in 2002, it can also infect governing parties.

personal leadership that provides the thread knitting the central party apparatus to its myriad of divergent local outlets.

Electoral Organization

The question of electoral organization takes us back to the great election in Missinaba County and the approach franchise parties take to managing competition. Leacock knew about this first-hand: he campaigned publicly for his party's position on the big issue but acknowledged how the foibles of the local electorate had to be mobilized. In his account he describes how a decision by party leaders made tariffs the dominant issue and set the agenda for an all-consuming public discussion, but recognized that Bagshaw and Smith had then to translate it into Tecumseh Corners terms in order to win local votes. His story, of course, is about the 1911 contest, one of the defining elections of Canadian history: though set in rural Ontario, it is also a caricature of the hundreds of riding contests fought out in every Canadian constituency over the last century. Our franchise parties fight elections on two levels: a national promotional campaign designed to persuade a volatile electorate of the merits of their policy prescriptions, and a parochial contest managed by local partisans designed to recruit a candidate and mobilize the vote. Each of these campaigns has a personal focus: the national on the party leader as a prime ministerial candidate, the local on the newly selected (or renominated) candidate for parliament.

Elections in Canada have long been regarded a serious business, arousing a "fury and enthusiasm" matched in few other democracies.[38] For the participants, they are too important to be trusted to the hands of those charged with maintaining the party in its inter-election quiescence. The parties all have peacetime generals and wartime generals. At election time, the leader circumvents the party functionaries and office-holders and recalls the wartime generals to manage the battle. Often drawn from among confidants in the leader's personal network outside government or party, these national campaign organizers typically bring with them specialized teams of activists and electoral-professionals.[39] Though some may not even be party members, they generally have well-established partisan histories

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38 Siegfried, *The Race Question*, 117.
39 Many of these individuals are in the polling, advertising and government relations consulting business and are rewarded with patronage contracts or by work for private firms and organizations seeking access to their political friends. These modern patronage networks bind political activists to prominent party leaders in relationships of considerable mutual advantage and are critical elements of the informal personal machines at the heart of the national parties electoral organizations.

and bring to the campaign needed strategic, legal, organizational and financial skills. The high profile, national campaigns they devise and run seek to set the election agenda and position the party in terms of a winning ballot question. They are shaped by polling and communicated through the mass media, targeting voters identified as susceptible to their party's message. When the campaign is over these individuals return to private life to await their leader's next call.

For all their undoubted power and persuasiveness, national party campaigns will fall short if there is no local organization in the constituencies able to harvest voter support. At a minimum, they need an organization capable of finding and putting up a candidate. In 1911 neither of the parties ran a candidate in every riding, in 2000 only one party managed to do so, and a party's national campaign goes for naught in a district where there is no candidate to vote for. In the absence of significant party bureaucracies and staff capable of penetrating to the grass roots, the parties must depend on their individual franchises, run by personalized networks of local volunteers, to deal with the peculiarities of local interest and competitive balance in the constituencies. Despite the manifest importance of a local outlet capable of maximizing election day support for the national party, the two campaigns are, to a remarkable degree, conducted independently of one another with minimal financial or organizational integration.

In Missinaba, the incumbent Bagshaw was shocked to discover the Conservatives were nominating hotelier Smith who had always seemed friendly to the Liberals. He should not have been surprised. Local parties are interested in finding a winner and willingly overlook an individual's partisan past in doing so. This encourages self-starting local notables to jump into nomination contests with the result that many candidates do not have strong ties to their national party or leader before being nominated.[40] In mobilizing new members to capture a nomination, or reactivating old supporters, candidates must depend upon highly personal campaign organizations. The candidate appoints the official agent required by law, names the campaign team and its strategists, solicits financial support, recruits volunteer help and employs any needed electoral-professionals. These local campaign organizations adopt the common branding logos of the national party campaigns but most get little real help and only small amounts of money from their national party organization.[41] They are left on their

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40 Carty, et al. provide examples (*Rebuilding*, 166-67); see also David Docherty, *Mr. Smith Goes to Ottawa: Life in the House of Commons* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997) 82.

41 R. K. Carty, D. M. Eagles and P. Bélanger, "Party or Candidate Contests? Money and Constituency Election Campaigns in Canada," paper prepared for the annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Quebec City, 2001.

own to devise and implement a campaign strategy that will maximize their vote in the riding. And their impact on the electoral process is real—they provide more than half of all election spending, they attract virtually all the parties' election workers, and they shift vote shares at the margin in a system where 1 or 2 per cent makes a difference to seats won and governments sustained.[42] When the contest is over these local organizations quickly atrophy, and need to be rebuilt before the party can contest the next election. Given the highly personalized character of the political franchises, a new local candidate will mean a substantially new and different local partisan organization.

Missinaba's Liberal MP, the ill-fated Bagshaw, had to run on a platform he clearly disapproved. For its part, his party's national campaign had to depend on a candidate who did not agree with party policy. Much the same story is replayed in ridings in every Canadian election.[43] A franchise system, structured to accommodate the demands of the locals who happen to capture the riding party association, ensures that in many constituencies the two campaigns will coexist in this uneven and unbalanced way. It is hardly a process designed to produce clear or intelligible collective decision making, or coherent teams of decision makers.

The Franchise Party System

The franchise model helps us discern the fundamental dynamics of party organization in Canada.[44] It also points to what are at once the basic organizational strengths and weaknesses of the system's parties. Their franchise structure allows national parties to encompass a wide variety of distinctive communities, and cope with the pressures of a complex, pluralistic society. They do this by tying their members and activists into local associations and giving them almost complete autonomy to choose their representatives and manage the affairs of their constituency party. Members work to support local politicians, but know that they have little influence on party policy. From this organizational base, party leaders can pursue an aggregation strategy designed to maximize their popular support. The difficulty is that lead-

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42   R. K. Carty and M. Eagles, ''Do Local Campaigns Matter? Campaign Spending, the Local Canvass and Party Support in Canada, '' *Electoral Studies* 18 (1999), 69-87.

43   Sayers' account of Vancouver Centre in 1988 (*Parties, Candidates and Constituency Campaigning*, 205-12) portrays a Liberal candidate with precisely the same dilemma, down to the issue, as faced by Missinaba's Bagshaw in 1911.

44   I would argue that allowing for the vagaries of inter-party variations the model can be applied to all Canadian parties. I am no longer as convinced of the distinction between parties with cadre and mass structures as I was when writing my *Parties in the Constituencies*.

ers can end up constructing coalitions that contain more internal contradictions (aggregation excesses) than their party members are willing to accept. When the discipline demanded of local MPs becomes an unacceptably high franchise fee, exit (to another association, party or out of politics) becomes a more viable option than voice, and a more tolerable option than loyalty, for the volunteers who people the local party units.

This franchise party structure works best when skillful politicians can develop and nurture the informal and personal networks necessary to knit together the otherwise separate elements of a decentralized organization, but the personal factionalism that it fosters makes it inherently fragile. In periods of rapid social change that overturn the country's electoral equations, or when institutional reform makes significantly new demands, the parties and the wider party system can quickly crack apart under the strain. This happened three times during the twentieth century.[45] After each crisis, the parties were rebuilt, always using the basic franchise model to structure their organizations, albeit with slightly altered bargains changing the relationship between members and party leaders. Each of those longer organizational cycles saw a strengthening of the leader's position vis-à-vis others, though a greater democratization of the process of leadership selection has left leaders increasingly vulnerable to the vicissitudes of an unpredictable and mobilizable membership.

Canadian parties are open and opportunistic, disciplined and fragile. The result is a less coherent or unified party structure than called for by the classic model of responsible parliamentary government. These are not organizations that can be easily counted on by governing politicians seeking to implement an agenda, nor are they an effective machinery for an engaged citizenry trying to hold its government accountable. They are nineteenth-century solutions for linking Tecumseh Corners to Ottawa. They have survived into the twenty-first century because they continue to be Canadian politicians' organizational response to their problem of connecting a diverse plural society to a set of inherited old-world governing institutions.

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45 Carty, "For the Third Asking."