

Vancouver Civic Political Parties: Developing a Model of Party-system Change and Stabilization*

FERN MILLER

Politicization¹ has been depicted by some writers as a developmental process, a process whereby party politics spreads from the national level (the centre of the political arena) to the local level (the periphery) performing the tasks of interest aggregation and articulation for complex societies.²

It is often the case, however, that local political processes resist the encroachment of national party politics or that party politics, having once been established on the local level, gives way to nonpartisan politics. Canadian municipal politics is dominated by nonpartisan government in the sense that most civic elections consist of candidates competing without the aid of organized parties. Where parties do exist on the local scene they are usually purely local groups.³ Recently, however, the efforts of the Liberal and New Democratic parties in the Toronto municipal elections and the New Democratic party efforts in Vancouver and Winnipeg have created a flurry of excitement among observers of municipal politics and have raised questions about the possibility of national parties establishing themselves on the local scene.⁴ Some political analysts look on the purely local parties — particularly those which have emerged as “reform” groups in recent years — as simply intermediate phenomena in the process of transition from nonpartisan to fully politicized local political systems.⁵ This process is regarded as a natural complement of the rapid

* I should like to thank Willis D. Hawley and Paul Tennant for their comments on this paper in its various stages.

¹ Politicization as used here refers to the use of the criterion of political party in voting for a candidate. It implies both partisan involvement in electoral activities and some response to that involvement on the part of the electorate.

² Stein Rokkan, *Citizens, Elections, Parties* (New York: Mackay, 1970), chapter 12.

³ See John G. Joyce, “Municipal Political Parties in Canada” (University of Western Ontario: Master’s Thesis, 1969), for a broad survey of the numbers and kinds of parties or civic organizations active in Canadian communities.

⁴ See, for example, the collection of articles in: Bureau of Municipal Research, *Parties to Change: the Introduction of Political Parties in the 1969 Toronto Municipal Election* (Bureau of Municipal Research Bulletin, 1971).

⁵ Joyce, *op. cit.*, for example, discusses civic parties as a transitional stage.

and recent growth, increasing sophistication, and general "coming of age" of Canadian cities. Thus, recent scholarly articles have focused on the questions: What went wrong in Toronto (where party impact was marginal)? How can federal parties best make the entry to the local scene? Why are nonpartisan municipal systems being transformed into partisan systems?

There is no doubt that political systems in the process of change offer unique opportunities for research on political growth and development. (Research on municipal political systems in North America has usually compared nonpartisan with partisan cities.⁶ It has not considered why one city might move from one system to another.) But we mustn't become so fascinated with the concept of change that we fail to see the other side of the coin — stabilization. Nor must we be so interested in one possible development that we fail to recognize that change may take many different forms. We must ask, then, not only why change takes place but why it takes the particular forms that it does and why it stops at a particular stage.

This study will, therefore, look at one of the cities in Canada where the tempo and content of local politics has dramatically shifted in the last few years, but where change has taken the shape of competing local parties and not an extension of the federal party system.

The major political force in Vancouver politics for the last thirty years has been the *Non-Partisan Association*, an organization formed in 1937 to unite local Liberals and Conservatives in a "free enterprise coalition" against the socialists, the *Co-operative Commonwealth Federation* (CCF). While its initial motives were more antipartisan than nonpartisan, the NPA incorporated some of the major principles that were associated with the American civic reform movement at the turn of the century. Specifically, these were the beliefs that the local level of government was different from higher levels, that "politics" was not necessary to run the affairs of the city, and that the basic elements of good local government were honesty, efficiency and sound finances. To ensure that no one party gained a predominant position in the association, care was taken throughout the years to balance Liberals and Conservatives (and

⁶ See, for example, Charles Adrian, "Some General Characteristics of Non-partisan Elections," *American Political Science Review* 46 (September 1952), 766-776; Charles E. Gilbert and Christopher Clague, "Electoral Competition and Electoral Systems in Large Cities," *Journal of Politics*, 24 (May 1962), 323-349; Willis D. Hawley, "The Partisan Bias of Nonpartisanship," (University of California, Berkeley: Doctoral Thesis, 1970); John H. Kessel, "Governmental Structure and Political Environment: a Statistical Note about American Cities," *APSR*, 56 (September 1962), 615-621.

later also Social Credit members) when drawing up the slate of candidates that the group would endorse, and when recruiting members and executives. To ensure that the organization remained as little like a party as possible, its functions were confined to endorsing (rather than recruiting) candidates and publicizing their selection, its period of activity was restricted to the months immediately preceding each election, and its executive rotated with each election. Successful candidates had no commitment to the organization once in office.

This loosely structured electoral organization has been remarkably successful over the years. In the elections of 1937 NPA candidates gained nine of the eleven seats contested for council and school and parks boards. (CCF representation was reduced to one alderman.) Over the years from 1937 to 1966 it succeeded in electing a large majority of the candidates which it sponsored.⁷ Although NPA majorities on council were free to operate without guiding principles and programmes, a tacit philosophy and style of operating emerged over the years. This style was an *ad hoc* and reactive one. Private and bureaucratic initiatives were favoured, industries and businesses courted and development promoted. Heavy emphasis was placed on the provision of physical facilities in response to the growth of business, industry and population with prestigious cultural and sports projects coming next in the order of priorities. No overall, long-range planning has been undertaken since 1928.

Prior to 1966 opposition to the Non-Partisan Association slates was sporadic. Three types of opposition appeared throughout these years: the independent candidates; competing slate-making groups; and various left-wing candidates and groups.

Though a number of independent candidates were elected in this period, they never posed any real threat to the NPA monopoly. The at-large system of election makes it too difficult for a candidate to become known without some sort of organizational backing and even many independents who were elected accepted NPA support in subsequent campaigns.

The two competing slate-making groups which appeared in these years — the *Civic Voters' Association* and the *Civic Action Association* — were concerned to give the voters some choice and to prevent the NPA from completely controlling City Hall. In doing so they expressed the same

⁷ No data are available on the exact percentage of NPA candidates elected over this period though a 1966 newspaper account estimated it to be as high as ninety per cent and a 1964 article noted that in the ten previous years only two persons were elected to the Parks Board without NPA backing, three to the School Board, and seven to City Council.

goals as the NPA — that is, “good government” and “finding the best candidates for civic offices.”⁸ Each had some brief successes, then splintered losing part of their members to the NPA.

An important indication of the Non-Partisan Association’s success is the fact that the left which they set out to defeat in 1937 remained weak and splintered.⁹ After the CCF died as a civic party organization, only one new civic party appeared to champion the cause of the left. Its history is brief but spectacular. In 1947 Effie Jones founded the *Civic Reform Party* and came close to upsetting the NPA mayoral candidate. The party’s fortunes declined after this and they faded from the political scene after the 1950 elections. The only other organized, though not exclusively political, group which supported left-wing candidates during this period was the *Vancouver and District Labour Council*. While they had some successes over the years, they found their activities costly — both financially and in terms of the internal unity of the labour movement itself. In general, then, while the NPA shared its market with other groups and individual candidates over the years 1937 to 1965, it never lost its position of dominance.

Around 1965 there began a noticeable trend toward a new politics in Vancouver, a trend that was to lead to the establishment of a system of competing civic parties. One of the first indications of a new politics was the election to council in 1965 of Bob Williams, a city planner and prominent NDP member. Though he retired after one term to enter provincial politics, his activities had a substantial impact on local politics. In particular his work in bringing planning issues to the force encouraged others to begin thinking along policy lines for the city.

Subsequently, in 1966, Williams helped organize *Citizens for the Improvement of Vancouver* and this group put up a slate of four candidates (all NDP members) in the aldermanic election. Their aim was to get a small group on council to enunciate a clear reform policy for the city. They criticized the other civic organizations for being too vague in purpose and challenged the NPA contention that it was keeping politics out of City Hall — a policy which amounted in fact, they maintained,

⁸ Both organizations discussed policy formation. The Civic Voters’ Association abandoned the idea and the Civic Action Association presented a programme in 1964 but it differed in no significant respects from the NPA’s explicit and implicit policies. (Its main points were efficiency at City Hall, tight control over expenditures, and efficient provision of services.)

⁹ There were some outstanding individual successes — most notably the election of Dr. Lyle Telford as the city’s first and only socialist mayor in 1939 — but no consistent organizational efforts.

to keeping other people's politics out of City Hall. While the group failed to elect any of their number to council, their showing was impressive. CIV candidates drew more votes than most independents, some slate voting took place, and the new group succeeded in appealing to many lower income, less well-educated, low status voters — the most difficult to mobilize.¹⁰ These results indicated that some form of organizational support was a great advantage in an at-large election and that an opening was developing for a policy-oriented, reformist party. At the same time, however, many of the CIV organizers felt that they could have been more successful had they had a more varied political composition. But the NDP refused to back such a group and many felt that they had been forced to "fly the party flag" even if at half mast.

A greater success for the left in 1966 was the election of Harry Rankin, a radical left-wing candidate, as alderman after ten previous tries. Rankin brought to his campaign a considerable personal following as well as the support of the Central Council of Ratepayers and the Vancouver and District Labour Council.

By 1968 the trend toward a new politics was further confirmed by the formation of *The Electors' Action Movement* (TEAM) and the *Committee of Progressive Electors* (COPE). TEAM was formed in early 1968 by a small group of businessmen, professionals and university people. Though the group was to be open to members of all federal-provincial parties, it was clear from the outset that it was not to be yet another standard nonpartisan opposition movement providing the voters only with a wider choice of candidates. The new movement emphasized the need for policy-formation and responsibility, broad citizen participation, and basic reforms in the structure and style of local government.

COPE was formed soon after TEAM. Sponsored by the Vancouver and District Labour Council and Alderman Rankin this organization represented an attempt to unite the various left-wing factions in civic politics — to create a broad-based coalition of the left. The founders were dissatisfied with the NDP-only campaign of Citizens for the Improvement of Vancouver and viewed TEAM as a junior NPA, another elite-dominated, essentially right-wing coalition. The organization adopted an extensive and detailed reform programme and, carrying the idea of responsibility further than TEAM, resolved to operate as a parliamentary party.

As the December elections approached, it became clear that both the

¹⁰ Donald Munton, "An Ecological Analysis of Voting Behaviour in Vancouver," (University of British Columbia, Master's Thesis, 1969), 102.

temper and tempo of local politics were being substantially altered. TEAM and COPE both grew quickly and had about nine hundred and three hundred members respectively by December. Electioneering was dramatically changed. Previous campaigns had been characterized largely by newspaper advertising, speeches to interested community groups and the familiar NPA voting-guide postcards. Now more intensive and extensive campaigning techniques were introduced. The new parties in particular counted on mobilizing the apathetic. Door-to-door canvassing, mass rallies, public opinion polls and better media messages and flyers were used and experienced federal and provincial campaigners aided in the thrust to get the voters out. A mixture of personality and issue campaigning ensued and the election period in general was marked by greater excitement than any in the past fifteen years.

The actual results were somewhat less dramatic. Voter participation did rise greatly — 34.6% turnout in 1966, 44.01% in 1968. But neither of the insurgent groups succeeded in wresting control of council or either of the two subsidiary boards from their NPA majorities. TEAM elected two aldermen (one on a recount) to replace aldermen who had retired. They also elected two school trustees and one parks commissioner. A new NPA candidate filled the third council vacancy but later defected to TEAM swelling their council ranks to three aldermen. COPE succeeded only in re-electing their popular incumbent.

The results were sufficiently encouraging to convince some of the local NDP members that the nonpartisan civic political rules had been broken and that the time was ripe for their party's entry into Vancouver politics. In 1969, in spite of strong opposition from many party members, the provincial party approved the attempt. To avoid splitting the left-wing vote, the local area council of the NDP and COPE formed an electoral alliance — each running half a slate. Some NDP members chose to remain with TEAM. Both TEAM and COPE remained active between elections and NPA prepared for the heightened competition by engaging a permanent executive-secretary.

The 1970 election results confirmed the acceptance of competing civic political groups and established TEAM as NPA's major contender. In the aldermanic race independents collected less than five per cent of the vote (compared to close to eight per cent in 1968) and no independent came close to winning any position. While the distribution of offices was little changed (TEAM electing one more school trustee), the vote tally clearly showed an ebbing of NPA's appeal. The older organization's share of the aldermanic vote declined all over the city with an overall

drop of five per cent (47% in 1968, 42% in 1970).¹¹ TEAM votes rose in most areas of the city and in its stronghold, the West side, it ran ahead of NPA in the aldermanic seats, and most of the top poll positions went to the challengers. The TEAM mayoralty candidate placed second, only 13,000 votes behind the successful NPA incumbent, and TEAM's unsuccessful candidates for school and parks boards were strong contenders.

At the same time the election cast doubt on the ability of both federal-provincial parties and leftist civic groups to effectively enter municipal politics. The incumbent alderman was again the only successful left-wing candidate and none of the others came close to winning. The NDP attained only a small fraction of its provincial voting support¹² and the addition of the four NDP aldermanic candidates to the left-wing slate augmented its share of its vote no more than might have been expected had four COPE candidates been added or had the NDP members run under the COPE banner.¹³ The school and parks board contests (traditionally regarded as "less political") registered still lower left-wing vote totals.

The 1972 elections were further confirmation of the basic trends established by 1970. With a slight drop in voter turnout and little change in its overall share of the vote TEAM succeeded in taking nine of the eleven council seats, eight out of nine school board places and four of seven parks posts. The TEAM mayoralty candidate ran unopposed by NPA and aided by a nonpartisan support group. COPE and NDP, running independently, were again largely unsuccessful, the one COPE alderman retaining his seat.¹⁴

In 1974, however, a revitalized NPA succeeded in chipping away some of TEAM's power margin. TEAM re-elected its mayor and increased its representation on the parks board by one member, but it lost two school board positions and its council edge slipped to six to five, enough for simple majority votes but two seats short of the two-thirds majority

¹¹ The figures of the 1968 and 1970 aldermanic votes were compiled by Neale Adams and presented in the *Vancouver Sun* in two articles: "The Computer and I Analyse the Civic Election," December 31, 1970, page 6 and "Key to Election is Number of Citizens Who Vote," December 4, 1970, 39.

¹² Vancouver East voted 51% NDP in the 1969 provincial election.

¹³ COPE, running six candidates in 1968 obtained 14% of the vote. If it could be assumed that the additional candidates would be equally popular, expansion of the slate to ten could have raised the share of the vote to as high as 23%. The 1970 left-wing electoral alliance obtained only 20% of the vote despite the fact that the NDP candidates were well known.

¹⁴ NDP also subsequently failed to win any seats in Vancouver's first community resource board election (see fn. 34), January 1974.

required for money matters. NPA's strength on council rose to three, it expanded its school board representation to three and it lost one parks board member. NDP was again completely shut out. COPE re-elected its incumbent alderman and made some significant advances in terms of popular support though not enough to translate into further electoral success. All three civic parties were represented among the five members elected to the board of the Greater Vancouver Regional District. The elections in general were highly issue oriented. NPA seemed willing for the first time to make its civic philosophy explicit highlighting what they believed to be a trade-off between practical services — roads, police, sewers, water — and prestigious projects such as the new Granville Street mall.

Following the election the older party expressed its intention to continue the policy fight with a caucus approach to council decision-making and pledged to act more like a party by institutionalizing means for consulting its members between elections. COPE and NDP used the elections to push for low-cost housing and opposed continued domination of municipal politics by developer, real estate and business interests. The school board elections involved a lively contest between libertarian TEAM candidates and an anti-permissiveness, back-to-the-basics group co-opted by the NPA. Finally, a referendum was defeated which would have authorized borrowing to finance a TEAM-proposed five-year plan for city development. Overall the elections can be interpreted as a qualified go-ahead for TEAM's policies of the last two years. NPA one-party dominance has not merely been replaced by an updated variant. A new political era of competitive civic party politics has been established.

The analysis that follows will address itself to explaining what factors conditioned the long period of NPA dominance between 1937 and 1965, what factors facilitated new party entry and success in the years following 1965 and what factors continue to inhibit federal-provincial party entry and deny success to local parties of the left. In broader terms we will be examining what factors facilitate or inhibit the entry of new parties into a political arena. Reference will be made to an economic model of party development and the analysis will draw on historical materials from newspaper files and on data obtained by in-depth interviewing of municipal political activists and office-holders in late 1971, a period when the conditions for a new politics had been firmly established and NPA was only beginning to awaken to the need to develop an adaptive strategy.

A useful model of party development may be constructed by analogy

to an economic market where one or a few large firms are dominant.¹⁵ The economic situation is very like the competing party system in two important respects. First, one unit's gain is another's loss — that is, the units are interdependent. Second, in both situations the major form of competition is product differentiation. Parallels may be drawn between different components of the two systems. The firms, of course, correspond to the parties. The buyers of the firms' products are comparable to the voters in the political "market-place." Economic entrepreneurs compare to the activist elites of the political parties and the investors to the party members. Both parties and firms are goal directed social organizations, the firm pursuing economic profit and the party seeking political power in the form of electoral office. While the comparison is not perfect, the problems of entry in the two systems are sufficiently alike to justify framing our political analysis in terms of the market mechanics of supply and demand ("supply" referring to the ways in which goods are produced and offered for "sale" in a market and "demand" referring to the quantity and quality of goods for which "consumers" exhibit preferences).

Both supply and demand factors may play an important role in creating inducements to entry. An initial condition for entry is the existence of a motive. In both high stakes provide the motive — profit in the economic situation and a sense of importance of political decisions in the political setting. Where the stakes are rising, the motive for entry is stronger. But along with a motive there must also exist opportunities for new organizations to enter and establish themselves.

In the economic market the existing firms derive considerable advantages from fixed capital assets, economies of scale and established reputations (producing "brand loyalties"). Standardization of techniques and relative consistency of consumer tastes reinforce these advantages. Similarly, in the political market-place the strength and organization of established parties and their successful identification with existing political preferences inhibit new party entry. In addition, in the political setting demand is filtered through political structures and processes which translate the distribution of political preferences into electoral choices. These structures and processes may have inherent biases which constrain new party development. Two immediate problems facing the potential entrant in either system,

¹⁵ The idea of comparing these political and micro-economic phenomena is drawn from Stephen Clarkson's evaluation of the federal party efforts in the Toronto municipal elections: "Barriers to Entry: Introducing Party Activity into Toronto Politics," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Volume 4 (June 1971), 206-223.

then, are *obtaining resources* and *capturing market-space or buyers*. How is this done?

Objective changes in supply and demand conditions often alter available resources and market-space to the advantage of newcomers as when an old firm declines, techniques or tastes change, or the population of buyers expands or its composition changes. In addition, both firms and parties have a great potential for market shaping or conditioning through advertising. So a newcomer may promote greater demand, different tastes or disaffection from existing products.

In general in the political context, the following changes in market conditions act as inducement to entry, opportunities for success:

A. Changes in Supply Conditions:

- (1) Rising political stakes which stimulate interest and free investment resources;
- (2) Organizational decay or ideological shifting of an old party — either of which may be exaggerated by skilled political attacks;
- (3) Changes in organizational and electoral techniques which give an advantage to a new party and cause the older party to suffer a relative decline;
- (4) Changes in social and political outlook which generate interest in a new party among potential political activists thereby creating investment resources.

B. Changes in Demand Conditions:

- (1) Expansion of the electorate through objective factors or successful mobilization efforts by a new party; or altered weighting of the electorate through re-distribution or changes in electoral boundaries;
- (2) Qualitative changes in political demand — changes in the social and political outlook of all or parts of the electorate — which may occur either as a “grassroots” or elite-led phenomenon.¹⁶

The nature of the inducements to entry — in particular the way in which political space is freed — affects the strategic considerations of the

¹⁶ Anthony Downs' propositions concerning the emergence of new parties are very similar but less exhaustive. In Chapter 8 of *An Economic Theory of Democracy* he hypothesizes that new parties arise when either a) a change in suffrage laws alters the distribution of citizens along the political scale, b) there is a sudden change in the electorate's social outlook because of some upheaval such as war, revolution, inflation, or depression, or c) in a two-party system, one of the parties takes a moderate stand on an issue and its radical members organize a splinter-party to force it back toward a more extreme position.

potential entrant. Thus, in a situation where market-space is freed as a consequence of a decline of an older party the new entrant must promote itself as a credible replacement. When changing demand conditions afford new political space, on the other hand, the entrant must appeal to the new interests or to newly significant voting groups by *differentiating* its product from that of existing firms.

Just as changing market conditions favour new party development, so fixed or relatively unchanging elements of the system set the limits for political change by restricting the emergence of new parties or conditioning the nature of the parties that will be acceptable entrants. Sources of such *barriers to entry* are: the *extant political structures and rules*; the *number, strength and quality of existing political parties*; the persistent and widespread *political attitudes and beliefs* of the society or community; and the *existing stakes of the game*.

In any given political setting some barriers to entry will exist along with any inducements to entry which may emerge. The outcome is determined by the interaction of these factors and their relative strength.

1937-1965: Dominance of Barriers to Entry

The Vancouver municipal party system in the years 1937 to 1965 may be described as analogous to an imperfectly competitive market with a strong leading firm. *Four barriers to entry* operated in favour of the NPA and to the disadvantage of competitors: *the group's organizational strength, low political stakes, the municipal political structure, and the NPA's successful imposition of a nonpartisan ideology* on the municipal political scene.

The NPA changed its organization and style of operation very little over the years. It continued to operate as a slate-making body, primarily active during the election period. The association was efficiently run by a long-standing executive secretary and well-financed by leading commercial and industrial concerns. The small size of the city contributed significantly to NPA's strength. It permitted the executive to operate effectively through a network of contacts to locate impressive candidates and important members without maintaining a massive infra-structure. So the NPA had important advantages over *any* potential competitors merely because it was already established. It had built up an organizational infra-structure, mobilized important financial resources, developed effective campaign tactics, and established its "brand name" in the minds of the public.

Moreover, the stakes of the municipal political "game" in this period

were generally regarded as low. The power of elected civic officials is limited throughout Canada for three reasons. First, the municipalities are the children of the provinces which control their powers and structures. Secondly, independent civic funds are low because they derive primarily from the property tax, an inflexible source of revenue. And finally, civic governments comprise many different, independent and semi-independent authorities which share power with the elected representatives.¹⁷ Vancouver's switch in 1956 from the council-committee form of government to the council-city commissioner variant¹⁸ further reduced the power of elected representatives and reinforced the general feeling that municipal politics were of little consequence. In addition to these structural restrictions on the scope of authority there existed generalized political-social attitudes and beliefs which limited the importance of political decisions. The 1950's on the whole were politically tranquil years for Western democracies, years in which the "end of ideology" was thought to be at hand. In Vancouver this was a period of growth and consensus and few important issues arose in municipal elections. As a result, low interest and involvement in local politics¹⁹ reinforced the small-city effect and enabled the NPA to sell its product to the voters without sophisticated campaigning. (For many voters the only information that reached them concerning the elections was the candidate-list flyer that the NPA mailed to all registered voters.) At the same time low stakes and civic political apathy limited mobilizable investment resources (workers and funds) for competing groups.

The electoral rules and districting system also impeded effective opposition to NPA. At-large elections and a long ballot (half of the council, school board and parks board were elected each year) in combination with the nonpartisan ballot (used in all Canadian elections) decrease voter rationality by making it difficult for the voter to accumulate, retain and assess information on all candidates. (This is particularly true for less educated and lower income groups.) If the less-informed vote, they tend to rely on known names and sponsors. Advertising costs are high. So, this system favours organizations over independents, established

¹⁷ In Vancouver, for example, the Board of School Trustees, the Board of Parks and Public Recreation, the Board of Police Commissioners and the Public Library Board enjoy varying degrees of autonomy from the Council. See Appendix 5 of Thomas F. Plunkeet, *Urban Canada and its Government: a Study of Municipal Organization* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁹ Turnout for the period 1951-1961 averaged 33% of registered voters. In a 1965 by-election the percentage of eligible voters who cast ballots dropped to 9.24%.

organizations over “new brands,” incumbents over challengers and right-wing groups over left-wing groups (because the latter attempt to appeal to the less educated working classes). Since the NPA had a strong organization, was firmly established, normally sponsored a large number of incumbents, and represented conservative views on municipal government, the Vancouver electoral system favoured NPA.

Finally, the Non-Partisan Association was successful in imposing a nonpartisan ideology on the municipal political scene. This set of beliefs was particularly suited to the apolitical 1950's and to Vancouver's consensual growth stage. Thus, many agreed with the NPA that municipal governments had neither the resources nor the authority to make political decisions, that many questions dealt with at the local level were technical in nature, and that the primary duty of civic government was ensuring good management: efficient, honest and economical provision of the basic municipal services — sewers, roads, lights, police, fire protection and so forth. From this point of view, the main problem in municipal politics was finding competent and devoted candidates for council who could best carry out these tasks with the good of the community as a whole their overriding aim. Political parties had no place at the local level and would only introduce graft, patronage and friction with other levels of government. They would also divide the candidates' loyalties between party and the larger community, impairing the co-operative community spirit of a small council and blocking progress. “Backroom boys” would participate in civic policy-making and act as an unnecessary barrier between Council and the people. Finally, parties would do nothing to increase the quality of the people elected and might reduce it. Some well-qualified business and professional leaders might be less likely to join a political party than to offer themselves for nonpartisan civic office.

Nonpartisan sentiments acted, as the NPA hoped they would at the time of its formation, as an effective barrier against left-wing groups in civic politics. These groups were able to differentiate their product from that of the NPA but found that it was unacceptable in the local market. They were identified with attempts to introduce larger political and economic questions into municipal affairs and to promote specific interests against the interests of the whole. Nonpartisan sentiments also acted as impediments to non-leftist opposition, however, because it set the limits within which these groups believed they could attempt to differentiate their product from that of the Non-Partisan Association. As a result, neither the Civic Action Association nor the Civic Voters Association ever challenged the prevalent NPA-established assumptions that running

a city was largely a matter of honest and efficient provisions of services or that growth and development were unquestionable values. NPA effectively set the political rules of the game just as a leading firm in an oligopolistic market sets the bounds of price competition. The new non-partisan groups were unable to find ways of differentiating their product within the limits set by these prevalent political attitudes and beliefs. They offered, essentially, "more of the same," and in the end they failed to achieve their goal of breaking the NPA hold over civic elections because they failed to *either* convince the public that they could perform the same functions better than the older, stronger organization *or* discover and promote new needs and demands on which to base an appeal.

In summary, the Non-Partisan Association's *organizational strength, low stakes, municipal political structures, and political attitudes and beliefs* operated in concert in the period 1936-1965 as barriers to effective opposition. So, NPA was able to remain dominant and even to co-opt a large number of independent candidates, key members of other competing nonpartisan groups²⁰ and even some left wingers²¹ with little modification of its organization and style of operation.

1965-1971: Inducements to Entry

The rise of TEAM and COPE and the success of TEAM in particular relative to predecessors in the competition with NPA is due to the operation of important *inducements to entry: changing demand conditions* in the context of *rising political stakes* and *organizational decay* and maladaptation of the NPA.

Changing demographic, social and economic conditions increasingly evident by the mid-1960's provided stimuli for *new demands and increased political awareness*. The growth of the city and of the metropolitan area have been factors of great importance. Vancouver's population doubled from 1936 to 1971 (253,363 to 455,000) and the population of Greater Vancouver increased 30 per cent in the decade from 1961 to 1971. While the growth rate of the city proper (13 per cent to 14 per cent over the last decade) is not outstanding compared to that of many other North American cities, its impact — both physical and psychological — is magnified by the restricted land space within which it has occurred.²²

²⁰ The original Civic Action Association merged with the NPA giving that association its present full title: the Civic Non-Partisan Association.

²¹ The most notable was A. T. Alsbury, a CCF member elected mayor in 1958 with the support of the Vancouver and District Labour Council. He left the CCF while in office and accepted NPA endorsement for his second term.

²² The city comprises only forty-four square miles closed off by water and the boundaries of its neighbouring municipalities.

Business and industry have expanded and the economy and character of the city have changed along with the growth. The primary extractive sector dominates the economy of British Columbia, but in recent years the proportion of Vancouver's labour force employed in occupations pertaining to services and trade has risen dramatically while primary, manufacturing and transportation portions of the labour force have declined.²³ The city is attracting increasing numbers of professionals and businessmen and life-styles are becoming more urban and sophisticated. In consequence, the downtown area has become an executive center and quiet residential areas have been permeated by the high-rise apartment complex. In the space of two decades the face of the city has been transformed.

The changes that have come with the growth of the city have altered the implications of city government's two general functions — the provision of services and the regulation of various aspects of municipal life. The rising population has produced greatly *increased demands* for the city's basic physical services (fire protection, policing, waste disposal, transportation and roads). The changing composition of the electorate has also introduced *new needs, interests and demands* into the political system. An important example is the concern for tenants' rights. In addition there has been a general concern with social questions which led to demands in the late 1960's for expansion of the municipal government's social service role.²⁴ Since the city budget is limited by its base in the inflexible property tax, new and increasing demands place great strain on municipal funds. Increasingly, therefore, council must decide which interests and needs will be indulged and which will be deprived in the provision of services.

Competing interests and needs also affect the city government's performance of the regulatory or rule-setting function. Many important conflicts involve the issue of land use. Vancouver has been unique in having, until quite recently, a large number of undeveloped areas in the heart of the city. These spaces are vanishing rapidly, however. Industry, commerce, transportation, housing and recreation all require land and, as the number of unused areas diminishes, competition mounts for both

²³ See City of Vancouver Planning Department, "Vancouver's Changing Population," June 1964, Table 5.

²⁴ The city government expanded its social service role considerably in the 1960's. It built several low-income housing projects and created a department of Social Planning and Community Development. Social services have since been taken over by the provincial government with a city Resource Board and thirteen elective community boards responsible for administration.

spaces which remain open for development and areas with potential for re-development. But the use of specific plots of land is not the only subject of controversy. Many have become concerned with the overall pattern of the city's development. Urbanization has brought with it threats to the environmental amenities in which Vancouverites take pride. Traffic congestion, pollution and population density have been continuing subjects of concern in recent years. Many feel that this is a crisis stage in Vancouver's development, that the city has not yet made some of the worst mistakes of older cities — freeways, over-development, destruction of the environment — and that these mistakes might yet be avoided. Therefore, they oppose further physical development on the grounds that it would hinder environmental preservation and conflict with social needs. This "quality of life" issue tends to pit environmentally conscious professionals and small homeowners against big real estate and development interests. The city government, with its powers of zoning and building regulation and its ownership of certain properties, is caught in the middle of the conflict.

Reinforcing the sense of rising political stakes and general urban crisis in Vancouver is the increasing importance of urban areas to the nation as a whole. Urbanization is proceeding rapidly in Canada and it is estimated that urban areas will contain nine out of ten of the nation's citizens before the end of the century. One immediate consequence of this urban explosion is a growing role for the metropolitan region. Many of the problems that Vancouver and other cities face are regional in scope and require regional solutions — traffic congestion, pollution, housing, preservation of parklands, location of industry and business, larger questions of planning in general. Regional units of government are emerging throughout the nation. Toronto and Winnipeg now have metro-federation governments and Vancouver is experimenting with a system of functional amalgamation in a regional district having jurisdiction over hospitals, parks, sewers and drainage, air and noise pollution and regional planning. Stronger regional government is a certainty for the future.

Another potential consequence of urbanization is an eventual expansion of the federal role with respect to the cities (as well as the possibility of federal-provincial party entry into municipal politics to establish grass roots contacts in the population of the future). Over the past ten years there has been evidence of growing discontent at both federal and provincial levels with the state or urban government and indications that the higher governments might like to take a larger role in shaping policy

directions of the cities.²⁵ The problems of the cities are becoming more important and the municipal governments must demonstrate their ability to handle them or forfeit control to higher levels.

In general political stakes have risen and market conditions changed. Urban growth and scarcity of resources have increased the importance of the values which may be authoritatively allocated in the municipal political arena and demands have become more sophisticated, differentiated and conflictual. These developments have been reflected in dramatic changes in the parapolitical structure of the community; the number and nature of community associations.²⁶

A particularly successful instance of interest group action in 1967 acted as a spark for subsequent activity. In that year members of the Chinese community in Strathcona formed the Strathcona Property Owners' and Tenants' Association (SPOTA) to oppose City Council's plans to put a freeway through their community using general urban renewal funds to demolish large numbers of older homes in the area. SPOTA succeeded not only in halting the freeway but also in shifting the emphasis of the federal programme from renewal to renovation. In addition their activities established the precedent that concerned community groups should be consulted prior to the formalizing of plans affecting their area. Pressure groups, interest groups, action groups, committees and associations of all kinds have mushroomed in the following five years, and there has been a startling increase in the political content of group activity. Concerns range from specific issues (opposition to a freeway route or a shopping centre plan) to general affairs of a specific neighbourhood, to social problems such as unemployment or tenants' rights, to overall planning for the city. In spite of the diversity of their concerns, though, the groups have one important factor in common: they are interested in affecting political decisions either by representations at the city level or through local participation and control, and so they reflect the *increased political interest and awareness* in the city.

New and conflicting needs and demands and the rising interest in

²⁵ Some indicators of this concern are: the creation in 1968 of the Cabinet Committee on Communication, Works and Urban Affairs (which evolved into the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs in 1971), closer federal supervision of the spending of its urban allocations, recent changes in urban government in Ontario and Manitoba, and a 1971 proposal by the former B.C. Municipal Affairs Minister for structural changes in Vancouver government.

²⁶ For a discussion of the effects of the structures of community associations, the parapolitical structure, on political activity see Scott Greer and Peter Orleans, "The Mass Society and the Parapolitical Structure," in *The New Urbanization*, ed. Scott Greer et al. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968), 201-221.

politics have provided unique opportunities for new parties. Political entrepreneurs and activists were the first to perceive the changing nature of municipal politics and the need for and potential marketability of "new products." In general they addressed themselves to the nascent demands for structures for political participation, issue development and policy formation.

TEAM and COPE organizers attempted to create strong and well-organized political groups with a broad membership and between-election activities geared to involvement. The new political entities were to act not just as electoral organizations but as mechanisms for channelling political inputs and encouraging citizen participation. Both had roots in the city's para-political mobilization. There was general agreement that the Strathcona freeway dispute of 1967 acted as a catalyst to the development of parties, raising political interest in the city and fusing diverse citizens and groups who were "generally irritated with the way things were being handled at City Hall." This pre-political mobilization created investment resources available to the new political entities. Most of the new party members interviewed were active in environmental or social issue groups or neighbourhood associations.²⁷ Inter-locking memberships and overlapping issues helped to create strong organizational infrastructures. Para-political mobilization also created a general political awareness and interest which the new parties exploited by means of campaigning techniques designed to stimulate and take advantage of voter mobilization.²⁸

Unlike NPA, which promised a vague and generalized goal of good government for all, the new parties took explicit stands on central issues of the day and identified themselves with particular concerns and interests. TEAM activists in general spoke of their members as young, well-educated, well-informed professionals concerned with environmental and social issues. A founder of TEAM explained its emergence as follows:

²⁷ The Centennial Study and Training Programme in Metropolitan Problems (sponsored by the Bureau of Municipal Research in Toronto) in 1967 and the Vancouver Tomorrow Conference of early 1968 were also important to pre-party mobilization of TEAM activists.

²⁸ In general the new groups counted to a large extent on awakened political interest working in their favour. The emergence of politically oriented action groups in the East side of the city, heavily working class in population, was a source of hope particularly to COPE. Before the 1968 elections its alderman expressed the belief that: "We can get elected in this area if we can turn out 5 or 10% more of the voters than the 29% who voted in the last civic election." So far, however, rising turnout has occurred in TEAM strongholds — the West and South of the city. In 1970 turnout in the West Side area was 59% compared with 38% in the East End and 31% in Mount Pleasant.

The old NPA has traditionally been the corporate downtown group . . . The group of people backing NPA and the City Hall bureaucrats all had a vision for Vancouver in the 1950's — post war materialist, development at any cost, emphasis on more buildings and physical facilities. In the early 1960's a change in values began to take place. An expanding professional middle class began to express concerns for other things — environmental and social. Their lack of representation in city government led to the founding of TEAM.

COPE spokesmen regarded their group as representing labourers, small homeowners and tenants. They too pointed to the problems of urbanization — in particular the housing shortage and the environmental crisis — as fundamental factors in the new party development and more concern for environmental and social values. They also decried the lack of an overall plan for the city and emphasized the need to co-ordinate Vancouver's development with that of its surrounding region.

Both new parties called, also, for reforms to strengthen the political side of city government — to better channel demands, facilitate policy debate and strengthen policy formation. All COPE members interviewed favoured a return to a full ward system while TEAM adherents back a partial ward system.²⁹ Many favoured printing party names on the ballot. Both groups recognized that new and increased interests and demands as well as conflicts of demands spelled an end to an era of distributive decision-making.³⁰ In consequence TEAM leaders placed great stress on the need for an active regulatory role for civic government:

The NPA councils have acted as *trustees* of the public wealth passing judgment on proposals initiated elsewhere. They just *reacted* to the private sector and the bureaucracy and attracted as supporters a group of people wanting weak government (the speculative and real estate interests for example) . . . TEAM believes that it is the city's job to initiate and to act. Our supporters are those who want an active role of civic government in improving social and environmental conditions.

²⁹ At a policy convention in early 1973 TEAM members switched to favouring a full-ward system but only three of their elected members accepted this change. A referendum on wards held in October of the same year favoured retention of the existing program.

³⁰ Theodore J. Lowi suggests this useful trichotomy of decision types: (1) distributive decision — those which give away or dispense things with no particular principle of choice or discrimination; (2) regulatory decision — those which restrict available alternatives and involve a direct choice as to who will be indulged and who will be deprived by application of a general rule, and (3) re-distributive decisions — those that take from one group of people and give to another. The relative abundance of resources (particularly civic funds and land) permitted the NPA councils to operate for years with largely distributive decision-making — ad hoc accommodation of private initiatives in the sphere of development, and equitable provision of basic physical services. "American Business, Public Policy, Case Studies and Political Theory," *World Politics* 16, 677-718.

COPE spokesmen on the other hand saw the new demand conditions as calling for a re-distributory role for civic government. They called for greater initiatives in the areas of public housing and tax reforms (to shift the burden from small homeowners to industry) and favoured municipal government ownership and development of important properties.

The second major inducement to entry was the decline of the *Non-Partisan Association itself* — both organizationally and in terms of credibility to the public. Several elements played a part in the decline.

Organizationally, NPA suffered a handicap in 1966 when the city election schedule was altered so that elections were held every two years instead of every year. The longer the interval between elections, the more difficult it is for an organization with no functions apart from selecting and backing candidates to sustain its infrastructure. Hence the NPA tended to drift apart between elections when there was no cause around which to rally.

The growth of the community also created organizational problems for the older group. The NPA executive relied for years on a “network of contacts” to recruit desirable members and candidates. As the city grew and business and professional sectors expanded, it became harder for a handful of men to know personally “everyone who ought to have an interest in the way the city was run.”

Moreover, in any organization, members and potential members need some incentive other than the pursuit of a “collective good” (good government or keeping the socialists out of office, for example) to induce them to help bear the burdens of maintaining the collectivity.³¹ The nature of the “noncollective benefits” that an organization can offer affects its recruitment potential. Naturally one important selective incentive that electoral organizations offer is the chance to compete for political office. However, the number of political offices is limited and organizations which offer other collective or private benefits which can be more widely distributed are at an advantage. This is not so for the Non-Partisan Association. Those NPA executive members who felt that the organization did provide them with personal benefits mentioned access to officials on business matters, or prospects for public office. These comments revealed that this organization’s side payments had become highly specialized rewards to a particular class of people. The new organizations, on the other hand, attempted to capitalize on the increased interest in community activities

³¹ See Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) passim and particularly Chapter 6 for the theory upon which this discussion is based.

by providing more generalized side payments in the form of social or recreational benefits — diverse meetings and committees to attend — and the change to help shape policy — a strategy that seemed to work.

A number of minor and more specific factors also contributed to the NPA organizational decline: the death of a long-time executive secretary and resultant confusion in records and campaign management; the demoralizing effect of the loss of the mayoralty to a charismatic alderman in 1966; and the loss of some major financial contributors (notably B.C. Electric, which was nationalized).

Another important dimension of the NPA decline was the deterioration of its image. Here the sympathy of the press for the insurgents — particularly TEAM — played a part. In the wave of awakened interest and participation an important point of attack was the lack of democracy in the older organization's candidate selection processes.³² Pressmen also attacked the aging membership of the NPA building up an image of the typical members as "little old ladies in tennis shoes." This weakened the organization's claim to be the guardian of good government. The NPA incumbents were also aging and the organization's inability or unwillingness to sever its ties with them was yet another source of weakness. Certainly it discouraged younger political activists within the city from joining, although the impact on voters was less. In contrast, TEAM played up its expert, professional image to win the support of those wanting the best, most able government for the city.

In addition, NPA became identified increasingly with large business and real estate interests. This was an important factor working in favour of the new groups. TEAM and COPE activists described their NPA counterparts as older, established businessmen and the picture is one which NPA members themselves affirmed. As one prominent official commented: "Who belongs to NPA? In general (they are) people who've got some financial spade dug into Vancouver somewhere and want to make sure it stays right."

Finally, NPA's failure to keep up to date with the concerns of the city, its failure to adapt to changing market conditions, hindered regeneration of membership and alienated potential supporters. In part it was a problem of organizational inertia. It is always harder for an older organization with established structures and procedures to change and innovate. But

³² Neither the names of the screening committee which investigates proposed candidates nor the process of selection of the nominating committee of around three hundred chosen from the general membership and "other interested parties" were ever made explicit.

of greater importance was the fact that most NPA members failed to see the political implications of the changing demographic, social and economic conditions of their city. Most NPA interviewees expressed contentment with the city as it was. And although many recognized that growth had been accompanied by problems, they saw these problems chiefly in terms of increased demands for services. The general NPA view of the role of city government remained centred on the distribution function. The following comments were typical responses to the question — ‘What are the most important things that municipal government should be doing?’:

Certain basic non-political things must be done first — essentially the provision of services — sewers, roads, lights, water, fire protection and zoning.

and —

The purpose of municipal government is to collect taxes from property and to provide services to property — policing, fire protection and so forth. It should also provide some community services such as theatres. Social services — services to people — such as the building of low-cost housing are not local government concerns.

NPA aldermen emphasized the increasing strains on finances and the primary importance of sound financial management. In general NPA personnel failed to recognize the growth of new needs and demands and the increasing conflicts of interests (particularly important regarding questions of development). They showed little concern for regulatory or re-distributive decision-making, and expressed caution regarding changes in the structure of municipal government: “We ought not to move hastily to change the present system of administration merely for the sake of change.”

Accordingly, most NPA members also failed to recognize the new party threat as different from previous opposition. They saw TEAM as “just another free enterprise party” trying to put different people in office and believed that the two major civic groups “would close ranks soon enough if there were a strong socialist threat.” COPE, of course, was seen as the old left in a new guise. There was no recognition of any demand for civic parties as interest aggregating and policy forming institutions. Many NPA leaders expressed the belief that greater citizen participation was desirable but unrealistic: “There is just not the demand for it.” Most scorned the idea of policy responsibility, calling it “unrealistic,” “impractical” and “politically stupid.” Hence, the NPA attempted to revitalize its organization to meet the increased competition by creating a perma-

ment office and installing a full-time executive secretary, but it did not alter or expand its functions. It continued to rely on its standard electoral techniques: the flyer on candidates prepared by the public relations consultants, coffee parties, phone calls to some voters, attendance at candidates' meetings. NPA activists had little contact with the new parapolitical organizations arising since 1967. Their memberships apart from that in NPA were commonly with the Board of Trade, the Downtown Business Association and older community service organizations such as the Red Cross and the Community Arts Council. The organization's major innovation in the years following the rise of the new parties was a "Civic Awareness and Candidate Development Programme" instituted in May 1971. Its purpose was to dress up and revitalize NPA's traditional function — the search for candidates. Most of the NPA activists saw no need for further measures such as policy debate and formation: "Everyone is against pollution and for good planning; the question is — 'Who can do it best?'" Their theory was that NPA had succeeded and could continue to succeed by concentrating its resources on one major task — the selection of candidates — and doing that task well. This strategy served them well in the past against challengers who tried to beat them at their own game; NPA merely sold the public on the superiority of their slate. However, now the nature of the game had changed; there were increasing demands for policy debate and for participation and it was to these demands that the new groups responded.

Many of the new party activists mentioned the NPA decline as a significant factor affecting their calculations. Most of the new party interviewees perceived NPA support to be declining significantly. They attributed its continued voting success primarily to the incumbency effect and expected their own groups to make further inroads as more NPA aldermen retired and when municipal political structures were altered so as to increase voter rationality. TEAM members expected the municipal political scene to stabilize sometime in the future with NPA continuing to exist in weakened form and representing the "conservative" views of older, low and lower middle income groups who fear change. TEAM would then represent "reform" views and COPE the "radical" position. COPE personnel forecast a different development. They expected TEAM and NPA to merge and local politics to split along left-right lines.

Differential Success and Remaining Barriers to Entry

To date TEAM and COPE have demonstrated different capacities to exploit the inducements to entry discussed here. While COPE has

attempted to ride the crest of the new wave of political interest and concern by associating itself with popular causes (notably tenants' rights and rapid transit) with issue development and a detailed civic reform programme, it has been less successful than TEAM in doing so because its leaders still regard the major civic political issue as economic injustice. COPE activists described their supporters in class terms, contrasting their "working class" and "labour" support with NPA's and TEAM's "establishment" appeal. Some of them expressed the hope that their endeavours in the civic field would help "educate the people to socialism." To this group the present "property versus people" civic controversy is the modern expression of the "big guy versus little guy" conflict,³³ the civic arena part of the larger battleground of the class struggle. This prevents them from effecting alliances across classes around new issues and puts them at the disadvantage of relying on mobilization of working class areas where voters are more likely to be alienated from the political system and, therefore, less informed and less likely to vote effectively. It also puts them at odds with the nonpartisan tradition in local government.

The shakeup in social and political outlook that has occurred, the questioning of growth and the realization of conflicting values at the civic level — was used by TEAM, on the other hand, as a chance to challenge some of the prevailing political myths within *an apparently successful redefinition of "nonpartisanship."* According to the TEAM interpretation, the evils of party politics are the evils not of local parties but of national-federal party incursions into the local sphere. (TEAM itself is a mixed group including a large number of NDP members as well as prominent Liberals and Conservatives.

Accordingly, TEAM adherents claim that the problems they illuminate and the issues they raise are *purely local in nature*. While they believe that political philosophy is relevant to civic politics, indeed essential to it,³⁴ they argue that the questions that divide — property versus people, growth and development versus environmental preservation — are local axes cutting across traditional partisan divisions.³⁵ The quality of life

³³ Bob McConnell, "Rankin Carrying COPE on Coattails," *The Province*, December 6, 1968, notes that the COPE platform consists of eighty-seven specific proposals for council, schools and parks "based on the unstated assumption that the little man is paying an undue share of the burden of civic government," of which "twenty-seven points require action at the federal or provincial level."

³⁴ Not many of the respondents agreed that "there is neither a liberal nor a conservative way to build a road." Many responded, "But do we need a road?" New party activists in particular denounced the 1950's apolitical, technical civic politics.

³⁵ It is of interest that TEAM activists tend to describe their supporters in intellectual terms ("the better informed," "socially conscious," "intellectuals") to a greater

issue, the debates on the role of council, city planning and citizen participation can be played to advantage in a purely local setting and a large measure of TEAM's success may be attributed to its ability to thus differentiate its product within the bounds of some yet potent political attitudes, beliefs and myths concerning party politics. It is TEAM, therefore, which has been the principal beneficiary of the inducements to entry. Ironically TEAM can exploit the changing demand by developing new issues and promoting white collar and professional interests yet also appeal to alienated NPA supporters by presenting itself as the legitimate successor to the nonpartisan civic mantle while COPE still bears the stigma of the old left association with narrow class interests and a larger-than-civic economic struggle.³⁶

The NDP has been no more successful than COPE in its municipal political efforts and there are reasons to believe that its failure evidences not just an anti-left bias but remaining, potent barriers to entry which militate against all federal-provincial parties. These barriers are organizational, attitudinal and structural.

First, the *space which has opened in the political market-place has been pre-empted by the new civic groups*. They have already staked their ground, established their product in the minds of the voters, mobilized resources, and co-opted many federal-provincial party members. There is no reason why they should be expected to relinquish the field.³⁷

Their adamancy is rooted in certain *fundamental attitudes and beliefs* widespread among the city's political activists, beliefs concerning parties and party systems, political philosophy and the requirements of local government. While the myth of apolitical managerial government providing services and solving "technical" problems that was inculcated by NPA is slowly being dispelled by the force of events and the activities of the new parties, certain elements of a nonpartisan civic political ideology are yet potent.

There was considerable reluctance among the civic party members to categorize their groups as "parties." The majority of the Non-Partisan Association refused to employ this label in reference to their group because

extent than either of the other groups. (Their tendency is to speak in terms of class or occupational groupings.)

³⁶ Some NPA supporters left to join TEAM and there are indications that TEAM is stealing the upper class vote away from NPA as well. See Munton, *op cit.*, 115-116.

³⁷ The NDP suggestion that COPE candidates run under its banner was staunchly rejected in 1970. COPE personnel maintained that they were there first and, if anything, NDP should join them.

NPA advocates no platforms or policy direction. TEAM and COPE personnel, on the other hand, were less reluctant to accept the term but added qualifications concerning the *special nature of civic parties*, distinguishing a small “p” brand of partisanship from federal-provincial style divisions: division on purely local issues, looser divisions, greater flexibility, federal-provincial party mixtures, and aversion to larger doctrines and philosophies.³⁸ Though endorsing the principles of policy formation and responsibility, the two new civic groups opposed rigid division on party lines. TEAM in particular publicly altered its initial stance on tight point-by-point policy responsibility in favour of a looser interpretation involving review of the representative’s overall performance after meeting fierce accusations that “backroom boys” would control its elected officials.

The general reluctance to employ the term “party” at the civic level is due to the fact that the term is associated in Canada with the parliamentary style party characterized by cohesion, caucusing and voting solidarity. Most don’t see local parties in this sense nor do they see that it is possible for parliamentary parties to operate within local rules and structures. It is too rigid an approach for civic politics; party loyalty might prohibit alignments on the basis of what is thought best for the community and block progress. Federal-provincial parties would bring with them an even greater threat — the selling out of local interests to larger party needs and the opportunity for the senior governments to “blackmail” the cities: “Elect our party or else. . . .”

These nonpartisan sentiments overlap with a strong drive toward maximizing *local government autonomy*. There is a strong parochial sentiment of attachment to Vancouver among the civic politicians and a hope and expectation that there will be an increase in the power of the city and of the metropolitan region in the future. To permit federal-provincial party incursions at this crucial stage would be to surrender potential civic power to the control of wider interests. Local activists believe they can get the best deal from the senior governments by remaining free of the political squabbles of the larger areas. The drive to local autonomy is also expressed in paradoxical beliefs concerning the problems of the city. While most respondents agree that the city’s problems are generally *urban*

³⁸ Members of all civic parties also expressed opposition to the representation of special interests and maintained that elected officers should work in the interest of the whole community. Each accused the others of failing to meet this standard. Thus TEAM and COPE members thought NPA represented real estate and speculative interests; some COPE thought TEAM did likewise; NPA accused COPE of being against business and TEAM of favouring the “eggheads.”

problems not distinct from the concerns of growing cities elsewhere, they reject the argument that federal-provincial governmental and party efforts might come up with the best solutions. The comment of one alderman is representative:

I fear a federal common approach. Look at the urban renewal programme — a disaster! . . . Rather than creating a federal bureaucracy, give us the money and let us do it ourselves.

Many feel that city politics is a distinctive field which breeds its own experts — men who might not become involved in higher level party politics.³⁹

But the skepticism concerning the application of federal-provincial party resources to municipal concerns is part of a larger set of *attitudes* and beliefs about the higher level party systems and party philosophies. Very few interviewers felt that it would make a difference to the city if a different party were in office at the federal or provincial level.⁴⁰ Even the NDP members were reluctant to claim potential benefits if their party gained power provincially or federally. Many felt that the results of a change in government would depend on the personnel or on the number of governing party representatives elected from urban areas. Some thought that the party out of office generally *promised* more for all. As to the relevance of party philosophies, most expressed the belief that parties in Canada are growing closer together, that party labels are not that meaningful any more and that, in any case, the old party lines are irrelevant at the municipal level where they fail to reflect the local axes of division, where there is “less scope for disagreement,” and where limited authority and resources constrain governmental action.⁴¹

A further factor reducing the attraction of federal-provincial parties to local political activists may be the absence of perceived ambition linkages

³⁹ One alderman, for example, stated: “The civic field is an area to be knowledgeable about. I talk to aldermen and city commissioners in other cities, not lawyers with party affiliations.”

⁴⁰ Some NPA members thought that any party other than NDP would provide about the same government, while some new party members felt that any party other than Social Credit would give the city a better deal.

⁴¹ Even the prospect of a “socialist” civic government evoked few extreme reactions. Many felt that socialism was less radical now that many early socialist ideals have been realized; others felt that socialist governments become more conservative in power. Only the left-wing party members felt that socialism would bring radical changes (in the areas of government ownership of land, community democracy, and re-distributive taxation).

between the political levels.⁴² In contrast to Schlesinger's observations on the importance of local office holding in Canadian parties (22.2% of Members of Parliament elected in 1957 moved from prior local positions)⁴³ only NDP members spoke of civic politics as a possible springboard to higher office. Few civic party activists expressed any interest in federal or provincial posts. Some held that civic politics was not a good route to other positions, while others contended that civic offices were significant ends in themselves: "The city is where it's at."

Finally, *civic political structures and rules* still pose impediments to federal-provincial party entry. First, the elective bodies are too small to operate effectively with rigid party divisions, particularly if more than two parties are involved. Secondly, the electoral rules do not facilitate traditional party style operation. The fortunes of leader and follower are not linked as they are at other levels of the Canadian political system, and the at-large system of election means that party candidates must compete against their fellow members at the polls. This makes for a politics with a greater individual flavour and mitigates against tight party unity. Nor would structural changes proposed to date necessarily favour federal-provincial party entry. The introduction of wards might make it even harder for parties to operate because it would ease the financial burdens on the individual candidate. And a board of control form of government might make it awkward for parties to operate because of the possibility that the board of control could be dominated by a different party from the larger body of councillors. Finally, civic government is still very much subordinate to the provincial level and the province could exercise sanctions against a politically hostile city. The federal parties may have had an opportunity to enter Vancouver politics when the need for issue development, policy formation and structures for participation first became apparent. The opportunity has passed, however. Competing local groups have captured the available political space and are unlikely to relinquish it. The majority of the local political activists, including many federal-provincial party members, are content with these civic groups and believe that federal parties are irrelevant, impractical, and illegitimate at the local level. Structural impediments add to the barriers against higher level parties and structural-procedural changes are unlikely to

⁴² Schlesinger, "Political Party Organization," *Handbook of Organization*, ed. J. G. March, contends that career aspirations are important determinants of party organization, in particular that: "... the greatest impulse for expanded and complex organization comes from the existence of progressive ambitions."

⁴³ J. A. Schlesinger, "Political Careers and Party Leadership," in Lewis Edinger, ed., *Political Leadership in Industrial Societies* (New York: Wiley, 1967), 282.

enhance their chances. The balance of forces seems stacked against large "P" partisanship for the future. Structural, organizational and attitudinal barriers interact to prevent federal-provincial party entry and promote a looser civic party system based on local issues.

Conclusions: Assessing the Model

In reviewing the rise of civic groups and the reticence of federal-provincial parties in Vancouver, the economic-based model of party development seems to have been of value. Inducements to entry offer a plausible explanation of the emergence of new civic groups and the success of TEAM, and barriers to entry account for the failure of earlier competing civic groups to establish themselves. Barriers to entry also explain the reluctance of the higher level parties to enter civic politics and the apparent failure of the NDP "too little, too late" efforts. Because of the generality of the theory, however, it should be expected to apply to a broad range of cases of party system change, and the present case study should be regarded as more an illustration of the model than a test.