

Rules of Engagement: How current tactics corrode the relationship between progressive parties
and their bases, and potential means of re-mobilizing the Left

by

Craig Donald Ashbourne
B.A., University of Western Ontario, 2008

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Abstract

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The professionalization of political parties has significantly altered the means by which parties interact with voters and supporters. The current study is an attempt to examine what these changes in political communication mean for the ability of parties to organize supporters and mobilize them both in a campaign setting and in the longer-term struggle. Habermasian and Gramscian perspectives on the relational aspects of political communication highlight the challenges presented by the growing unidirectionality of communication and the concomitant atrophying of intermediary institutions. Beyond this, the work of Bottici and McLuhan is used to expose the effects of the 'arational' aspects of these changes in both form and content. To test the plausibility of the theoretical insights obtained, the case of the New Democratic Party of Canada is considered. The study concludes by considering the potential of new technological developments for resolving or mitigating concerns identified throughout the thesis.

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That being said, there are a few people whose contributions cannot go unmentioned. First of all, I want to acknowledge a great debt to my undergraduate mentor, Chuck Levine of the University of Western Ontario, for many debates over the normative-ethical insights of Habermas which I thoroughly enjoyed and which laid the groundwork for parts of the third chapter of this thesis. I also need to acknowledge my parents, Dan and Lynda, who encouraged a constant questioning and reasoning that has stood me in good stead in the worlds of academia and politics, and who instilled in me the values that people on the Left are working for around the world. Finally, I want to acknowledge in particular a debt to Kim Lear, without whose support and encouragement this thesis quite simply would not exist.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the late John Gilbert “Jack” Layton.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In the postwar period the tactics by which parties in democratic countries attempt to reach voters have changed drastically. The competitive nature of politics and the rapidity of election cycles means that political parties exist in a hyper-evolutionary context, where the techniques and even the tools themselves that are in use one day may be discarded the next, and where conversely the radical new idea attempted successfully by one actor in a given election may be seen as accepted, or even requisite, practice by the next. However, this very rapidity of adoption and adaptation raises the question: are parties aware of what these changes might mean for them in the long term – or for that matter even in the short term?

This is as true in Canada as anywhere else. However, as a result of their having been taken up by a broad spectrum of parties from all points on the left-right continuum, the majority of authors assume that these changes are free of their own ideological character. The question of the impact of new techniques is often lost in a belief that these changes have no more severe impact on progressive parties than conservative ones. Yet at the same time, activists on the Left continually talk of the need for means which reflect desired ends¹ – in other words, the notion that those who want to change the world must live in the way in which they want to see the world remade. This argument would seem to imply that any one particular set of techniques or means of conducting politics is not compatible with each and every set of political goals. So which is it? Can new techniques that work for one party be put in place by any other, or do particular tactics have effects which are detrimental to the goals of particular parties? And if so, what are the effects of the professionalization of tactics that have occurred over the last half century, tactics which have for the most part been adopted by parties across the spectrum? The

¹ Though this may be the case in the modern Left, it is important to recognize that their vanguardist predecessors often justified authoritarian means in order to reach more equitable ends.

exhilarating success, and then rapid disappointment, of the 2008 election of Barack Obama in the United States, challenges the idea that electoral victory on its own will be sufficient to create the change desired by those within progressive parties. Yet the adoption of new, professional tactics for communicating with and organizing supporters is, for the most part, built on a foundational belief that the goal is electoral success. If this goal is not sufficient, in and of itself, what else must parties be building in order to succeed – and to what extent do the professionalized tactics in use by nearly all parties support or undercut this work?

These are the questions I set out to look at here from a progressive, or ‘Left’, perspective, by which I place myself within a movement striving for greater economic and social equity, combined with a greater participation by all in shaping the rules under which we are all governed. Recognizing that much development has happened in political communication and organizing tactics in the post-war period, this study asks whether this ‘progress’ in communication and organizing tactics, the backbone of political campaigns, can truly be called progress. Political tactics are certainly changing – on that there is broad agreement. As will be considered in the next chapter, there is even broad agreement as to the general trends and their manifestations in political campaigns throughout the West. But do we actually understand what it means to undergo these changes? In raising this question, and looking beyond the surface of their adoption by parties across the spectrum to engage with the effects of these processes on progressive parties, several questions oriented my work:

- What has changed in the way that progressive parties communicate with, organize and mobilize their supporters?

- Do these changes have specific effects that impact differently on conservative and progressive parties, or can they be claimed to be unbiased?
- If not unbiased, what sort of effects have these changes had on progressive parties and on their ability to achieve their own ends?

Though this work is deeply rooted in theory, it is not merely a theoretical exercise. This is a particularly critical and fluid time for progressive politics in Canada. The ability of the right and centre-right to coalesce around a single party, the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC), while the left and centre-left continue to struggle to find their way between a Liberal party that appears on the downturn, New Democrats adjusting to a sudden and startling surge, and Greens who have just elected their first MP carries many risks for those who see Canada in any hue other than Conservative blue. At the same time, the recent success of the NDP in an election in which they made use of many of the professionalized tactics in question here highlights the need to study the ways in which that party is changing. It also draws our attention to the effects of tactics which, though successful at the moment, remain – as Panitch (2001) is quick to remind us – badly understudied. If the NDP is to cement its recent gains, and take on the role of chief opponent to neo-conservatives and the religious Right, then it needs to consider how it came to this place, how the journey has changed it, and how best to move forward.

Thus, the purpose of this study is twofold. On the one hand, this study represents an attempt to understand at a theoretical level the effects of widespread changes in political communication on political parties, and more specifically on progressive parties. If the institutionalization and professionalization of politics has moved parties away from their base as movements, shifting the means by which they interact with voters and supporters, what effects

can be inferred in terms of the ability of progressive parties to activate these bases? In other words, *what do these changes mean for the ability of the party to organize supporters and mobilize them in both a campaign setting, and in the longer-term struggle for more thorough-going social and economic change?*

Secondly, this is not merely a mechanical task of ‘finding out how it ticks’ – this is an explicitly partisan process. As a supporter of progressive causes, and a card-carrying member of the NDP, I have a vested interest in encouraging political communication practices that allow me as a voter to communicate *with* the party, and as a member to communicate *for* the party, as well as in articulating changes which might aid the party. I see this as the particular strength of this study, holding with Gramsci’s arguments both against abstract theoretical arguments (1971: 200-201) and in favour of the necessity of the partisan nature of all research and action (2001: 44-46).

Thesis Overview

Before any theoretical analysis can be undertaken, however, a clear understanding of the trends under study is necessary. To that end, Chapter 2 will consist of a consideration of the history of political communication in Western democracies over the postwar period, a history which shows evidence of several key trends. The transformations within this field have been primarily characterized as either a *professionalization* (Negrine 2008; Negrine et al. 2007; Blumler & Kavanagh 1999; Blumler 1990), a *mediatization* (Stromback 2008; Bennett & Entman 2001; Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999), or a *modernization* (Norris & Curtice 2008; Norris 2004) of politics. Regardless of what name it is given, there is little disagreement that a wholesale transformation is underway of party communications with both members and the electorate. A careful survey of the political communication literature suggests that these processes have several key interrelated effects: a growing centralization of campaigning, an

increased focus on the leader, and a greater reliance on capital-intensive, rather than labour-intensive, tactics. The interplay of these effects, though not necessarily seen in terms of greater historical trends by practitioners, is recognized by those in the field in terms of a trend towards favouring the *air war* – or the marketing of the party to a wide audience in a broadcast manner, in much the same way as a consumer product – over the *ground war*, the one-to-one contact of organizers and activists at the local campaign level. As Bennett and Entman (2001) argue, this results in a ‘mediated’ and unidirectional form of politics – a politics of reception of information rather than contribution to debate. The air war is targeted not at citizens but at consumers, with candidates marketed in the same way as competing sneaker brands.

In the two chapters that follow, these trends will be analyzed from a theoretical perspective, focusing on the effects that might be expected as a result of shifts in the professionalization process. In the first of these, Chapter 3, the focus will be on the relational aspects of political communication. The chapter opens with Habermas’s distinction between strategic and communicative action, and the implications of each type of action for the intersubjective relationship between participants, after which Gramscian perspectives on the relationship between the constituent parts of the modern party will interrogate the ways that the relational shifts identified might affect the long term viability of the counter-hegemonic project of progressive parties.

Habermas’s (1987, 1984, 1979) approach to communication distinguishes between communicative action and strategic action. The first can be understood as communication oriented towards reaching understanding through discussion; the second is identified with instrumental, or goal-oriented, action. This chapter will consider how this distinction can be productively applied to highlight the difference between communication oriented towards

enabling or furthering the possibilities for democratic discussion and communication oriented towards reducing the possibility of such. Habermas (1987) himself lays out the dangers which exist when the latter becomes predominant. He associates the predominance of instrumentalized political communication with bureaucratization and the colonization and erosion of the lifeworld by system demands.

Applying this argument to trends identified in earlier chapters, a parallel will be drawn in this section between these divergent types of communication and the division within political communication that is recognized by practitioners as the distinction between the *air war* and the *ground war*. The air war, in this view, has as its goal the marketing of a product, and ultimately its only concern is instrumental – the delivery of the plurality of voters for a given election. The effects of this instrumental orientation, with its treatment of voters as objects, rather than alters, will be considered in terms of its effects on the intersubjective relationship central to the success of the Habermasian communicative act. The theorized long-term effects of this type of orientation will be considered in this chapter. While such strategies may continue to deliver voters, this section will question whether these votes come at the cost of losing members, leaving the party in a position where it is no longer able to mobilize but is reduced to simple marketing. This transition from citizen to consumer is predicted by Habermas (1987), and it is central to the politics seen occurring in Giddens's (1998) 'Third Way'.

At this point, Gramsci's insights as to the importance of this relationship for the effectiveness of the modern political party will be brought to bear on the effects noted by Habermas. Critically, the Gramscian party is far from the vanguard articulated by Lenin. Neither entirely the product of the people making it up (the populist pole) nor entirely the teacher (the 'Leninist' pole), Gramsci's party is, like Machiavelli's prince, a combination of both teacher and

student – the teacher who “is himself a product of the people he intends to educate” (Fontana 1993). By contrast, in the modern electoral party, taking on what Negrine (2008) has termed the cartel form (in which the party has to a large part separated itself from the membership even with regard to party finance) the masses have become to a large part secondary to the party. Where the party is seen by Gramsci as a collective intellectual, part of (and yet not the vanguard of) a change which to him needed to be popular and organic, the party that Negrine sees by the late 20th century has become a professional machine, delivering votes when needed and at best an inconvenience in the interim.

In Gramsci’s (1971) view the party requires for its existence three primary elements – mass, cohesive force, and intermediary. In this section, Gramsci’s notion of the interrelated role of these three constituent parts will be applied to a consideration of the relational effects of the professionalizing trends identified earlier in the chapter. This represents an attempt to address the lack of focus on the effects of the actual organizing practices of progressive parties, a lack which Panitch (2001) notes must be addressed in order to both understand past shortcomings and expose more promising alternatives. In some ways, these changes may be beneficial to certain aspects of the party - increasing cohesive force and internal control for example through stronger centralization and leader focus (Gibson & Rommele 2001). At the same time, others identify the reality of the atrophying of the intermediate institutions and practices which used to link individual members to parties (Bradford 2002; Yates 2002).

In Chapter 4, the second of the theoretical chapters, the focus will widen beyond the rational aspects of political argumentation, and the work of Chiara Bottici, George Lakoff, and Marshall McLuhan will be used to expose the effects of the *arational* aspects of the changes in both the content and form of political communication. Chiara Bottici’s reconstruction of myth as

it relates to political philosophy troubles the rationality assumed by Habermasian perspectives on political debate. Her notion of the mythic as ‘alter’ to, rather than opposed to, truth – the arational, rather than the irrational – will expose additional aspects of political communication for examination. The central importance of these arational aspects, what George Lakoff (2002, 2004, 2009) refers to as ‘framing’, in terms of the ways in which a listener interprets and is affected by communication will be considered in light of the results of recent cognitive science research regarding the importance of metaphor in human thinking. In this way, Lakoff’s work allows a consideration of the dangers inherent in the fact that progressive parties have to a large part ignored the significance of the framing of arguments.

Following this, the work of Marshall McLuhan (1964, 2003) and Harold Innis (1951) will be employed in order to suggest that the arational effects of political communication techniques should not be seen as limited to their content. In opposition to the arguments of those who suggest that political marketing techniques are somehow neutral (Scammell 1999), that they transcend or have no interaction with ideologies, McLuhan’s theories claim that techniques have effects of their own – that “the medium is the message”. In the final section of this chapter, therefore, the argument will be made that, in keeping with McLuhan’s argument, the means by which content is delivered must be considered in terms of both their intrinsic and extrinsic effects on the message contained within.

Moving beyond the theoretical argument, Chapter 5 will test the plausibility of the theoretical lens developed thus far in the thesis through a consideration of the case of the New Democratic Party of Canada (NDP) and its predecessor, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). The limitations of a Masters’ thesis mean that any such investigation must be of necessity a limited one, yet even a single case may be of use in further grounding the

theoretical insights of earlier chapters. Rather than an extensive empirical testing of the theoretical argument, what will be attempted here is what Harry Eckstein (1975, 1992) refers to as a ‘plausibility probe’. In such a study, the goal is not to definitely prove or disprove the theoretical insights, but rather to ascertain, as economically as possible, and through the use of a particular representative case, whether there is reason to believe that the theory and its potential analytical utility are plausible enough to justify the costs in terms of financial and human resources of a full investigation.

The particular case of the NDP/CCF was chosen for two reasons. First, as the sole social democratic party in Canada, it is the closest fit (particularly in the early years of the CCF) for the type of counter-hegemonic party with which Gramsci was concerned². In addition, my familiarity with this particular party and involvement with its current campaigning practices – practices which parties are understandably reluctant to open to outsiders – provides greater access to the communication tactics under study. Finally, the relatively recent transition from movement to party, as well as the view of many historians that the CCF/NDP represents an intriguing hybrid of movement and party (Penner 1992; Morton 1986; Young 1969) make it an ideal case to study the insights of the theoretical lens developed in the previous two chapters. Because of these features, the effects of any changes which challenge the connection between the party-as-institution and the party-as-movement would both be visible earlier, and would presumably be exacerbated.

² There are significant debates over the degree to which social democratic parties can truly be considered to be counter-hegemonic movements (c.f. Przeworski 1985 for the classic argument on this front, and Williams 2008 for a more recent consideration in the context of the global South). While the parallels between social democratic and counter-hegemonic movements are far from perfect, the similarities provide a basis for the choice of the NDP. In addition, this study may highlight additional challenges for social democratic parties attempting to present a counter-hegemonic alternative.

This chapter concerns itself with a historical look at the party's development. Crucially, this is an examination of several key points in the history of the party's communication/organization practices, rather than an exhaustive history (for such histories, see Penner 1992; Whitehorn 1992; Morton 1986, 1974; Brennan 1985; Young 1969; Lipset 1950; McHenry 1950). I will draw on some of these comprehensive works in the course of this study. The goal in this chapter will be to examine the CCF/NDP's history in light of the theoretical analysis developed in the previous two chapters. Several key questions that stem from the theorists discussed earlier will orient the analysis, and will include:

- What are the effects of tactical developments on the relationship between the party and the voters, and consequently the ability of communication to be persuasive?
- What are the effects of tactical developments on the relationship between the constituent parts of the party, (e.g. between the party and the greater mass it must mobilize to meet its goals), and what effects do these relationship changes have on the party?
- Do the arational characteristics of these tactical developments support or contradict the goals expressed in their content?
- Do the effects, both extrinsic and intrinsic, of any developments in the means of communication support or contradict the ends of the party?

The discussion of key turning points in the party's practices will include first the movement from the CCF to the NDP in the 1960s and the resulting Waffle resistance to the changes entailed by the greater financial resources of the new party, and second the opposing directions offered as a response to the party's decline in the 1990s by those advocating either greater professionalization

or a redevelopment of the party along the lines proposed by the New Politics Initiative. These points are of particular interest because of the opposing views within the party at the time. This will allow for a consideration of the theorized impacts both of the developments made in technological and organizational structure, as well as those proposed as alternatives by internal factions resisting these changes in practice.

Finally, a concluding chapter will consider what lessons progressive parties and academics studying them can take from this analysis, while also pointing out potential avenues for further research. As well, this chapter will consider what potential the current socio-economic and political context offers for resolving or mitigating the negative consequences of the professionalization trend in political communication. While contextual factors will play a role in the choice of particular tactics or technologies, some key questions identified throughout this work will concern all political parties assessing the potential benefits and challenges of newer tactics and techniques. In particular, I consider the potential of new technological developments for resolving or mitigating the negative consequences. To that end, literature which highlights the potential for mobilization and organization of newer, more participatory and interactive Web 2.0 interfaces (e.g. Boulianne 2009; Norris & Curtice 2008; Agre 2002) suggests some ways the unidirectional 'information transmission' forms of media might be supplanted.

Chapter 2

The Professionalization of Political Communication

The post-war period has seen radical changes in both the tools and techniques of political campaigning. This is captured by a number of authors under different names – modernization, mediatization, Americanization or professionalization – names which reflect the authors’ opinions of the varying influences of particular mechanisms on this process. Each of these perspectives has its own gaps. Taken together, however, they paint a fairly clear picture of a process that is occurring across western democracies, albeit at varying speeds and in context-specific ways. Before turning a theoretical eye to analyzing the effects of this process in the next two chapters, an examination of the two leading perspectives, *mediatization* and *modernization*, will provide some insight into current understandings of these changes.

Political Communication and the Media

For those scholars in the *mediatization* camp, changes in the media over the last century are the primary driving force behind the evolution of political parties’ communication tactics. It is hardly questioned that the media have some impact on audiences, whether in terms of agenda-setting, focus, or framing (Woodward 2007). But these authors emphasize that the way the media influences those who want to be covered has not been looked at in the same detail. This neglect is increasingly recognized in recent years, and some theorists of political communication have begun to look at how the logic of the media shapes political parties, especially in the media-hungry environment of Western electoral politics.

One of these authors, Stromback (2008), highlights four key stages of the growing influence of the media. In his view, the first stage of influence begins when the media constitutes the dominant source of information for the public, and also the primary channel of communication between governing and governed. In this early stage, however, the media that are relevant to political parties are primarily extensions of these parties, serving merely as an arm of

their communications apparatuses. As a result of this degree of dependence, they are shaped by parties' needs and their influence on parties' actions is negligible. In the second stage, by contrast, the media that are critical for party fortunes have become increasingly autonomous, beginning to choose what material qualifies as newsworthy. No longer a simple extension of the party's communications wing, the media remains controlled by those loyal to the party's ideology but is no longer entirely dependent on the party for its existence. It is at this stage that Stromback suggests the conflict between 'political logics' and 'media logics' begins to occur, though at this early stage the logics of the political sphere remain dominant in the majority of cases.

In order to understand this conflict, it is necessary to look more closely at what Stromback means by political or media *logics*. Drawing on a number of writers concerned with the confluence of democracy and the media, he argues that media logics represent

the dominance in societal processes of the news values and the storytelling techniques the media make use of to take advantage of their own medium and its format, and to be competitive in the ongoing struggle to capture people's attention. (P.233)

In contrast, political logics exist when

the needs of the political system and political institutions ... take center stage and shape how political communication is played out, covered, and understood ... [when] what is important for people to know, as interpreted mainly by political actors and institutions, takes precedence. (P.234)

Building on Meyer (2002), Stromback argues that these two logics create diametrically opposed visions of the media's role in communication:

In the former case, media companies are essentially perceived of as commercial enterprises with no particular obligation apart from catering to the wants and needs of their audiences. In the latter case, media companies are

perceived as political or democratic institutions, with some kind of moral, if not legal, obligation to assist in making democracy work. (2008:234)

This question (of the conflict of commercial interest and public interest) will be central to the discussion of the effects of media logics later.

Stromback's third stage resembles the second, but the balance of power is reversed. While the field is still contested by political logics, media logics become dominant as the media grows increasingly independent from political parties. At the same time, the growing importance of the media as a means of reaching voters increases the dependence of political parties on the media for their survival and success. Rare in my experience is the campaign manager today who does not on the one hand consistently curse the media for a perceived unfairness in coverage of her candidate, while simultaneously fretting over how to increase this 'earned media' coverage. At this stage, given the growing dominance of the media, Stromback argues that adaptation on the part of political actors begins to occur, though unlike in the following stage these adaptations remain consciously perceived by these actors as strategic actions taken in response to the demands of the media reality.

In the final stage, this perception begins to fade and is eventually lost as media logics are internalized by political actors – adopted rather than adapted to. While in the third stage the strategic adaptation to media logics primarily existed at times of heightened dependence on the media, for example during election periods, in the fourth stage Stromback suggests that the internalization of this logic breaks down the distinction between campaigning and governing, leading to the development of the 'permanent campaign', as even governing now becomes shaped by media logics. This can be seen in the growing use of government communications tools for partisan use (consider for a moment the degree of partisanship in the *Alerte-Info-Alert*

messages emanating from the Prime Minister's Office under Stephen Harper), as well as in more subtle ways, such as the naming of bills for the benefit of public/media consumption³.

Though Stromback's model presents a relatively good synthesis of much of the earlier work in the mediatization camp, this is not to suggest that opinion is uniform on the matter. First of all, several authors (c.f. Zaller 1998; Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999) believe that this emphasis on the role of media logics is neither as overarching nor as dire as Stromback and others would suggest. Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) identify much the same process at work, but they argue that the increasing role of the media in Western democracies doesn't present the danger that Stromback identifies. Yet their critique of the "apocalyptic" arguments of critics of media-driven democracy seems to be based on a quantitative rather than qualitative difference in their view of mediatization. Accepting that the growing power and independence of the media has forced an adaptation in the political sphere, they content themselves with claiming that this growing power "although far-reaching, is not so pivotal that it puts the media complex in the place of the political parties, narcotizes the public, or diverts citizens from civic engagement" (249).

Yet to argue that this is no longer a troubling change simply because the media complex has not entirely replaced political parties is to miss the point. Even the most 'apocalyptic' arguments around the mediatization of politics do not go so far as to suggest this.⁴ In fact, the source of the influence, and the danger, of the media logics in Stromback's model is based on the

³ One recent example of this, U.S. HR 3140 or "Reducing Barack Obama's Unsustainable Deficit Act", has taken this politicization of bill naming to a new low.

⁴ However, Marshall McLuhan comes close in an interview regarding propaganda that will be considered in more depth in Chapter 4.

very fact that they maintain political parties, simply adapting them to the point at which they internalize a new set of logics which guide their practice.

A far more vital critique comes from authors who argue that any model of the effects of the media on political actors needs a less deterministic view of these effects (Agre 2002; Dahlgren 2009). In this view, which is also noted by Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999), parties are not simply static objects to be moulded by outside forces. Rather, they are conscious actors who choose how and to what extent to adapt to the demands of media logics. While these authors recognize that this freedom to choose is severely constrained by electoral competition, this argument opens up two key points that will become more important later in this work.

The first point is made by Agre (2002) in considering the effects of technological change on political parties. He argues that change in strategies and methods is not determined. Instead, particular technologies are chosen because they are in line with the goals of the organization. As a result, these changes amplify effects of already existing strategies, rather than shaping them outright. Agre is speaking here of technological change, and in particular of the Internet. But his argument that institutional actions must be recognized to be at the core of institutional changes holds as true for changes influenced by developments in the media as for those rooted in developments in the technological realm. This argument focuses our attention on the role of already existing strategies of political actors in choices to adapt. Later, this will shed light on how the choices of political parties tie into the strategies they pursue.

The second point is raised by Dahlgren (2009), who argues that there exists a form of symbiosis between political and media actors (though one that he agrees with Stromback is tilted in favour of the media). In this symbiosis Dahlgren argues that it is not just the acceptances and

internalizations of the media logic that are important, but that the rejections of media logics and actors' adaptations to frustrate the goals of the media are just as critical. Taking the example of recent changes in journalism that focus on scandal and drama, Dahlgren (2009:45-47) argues that while this 'tabloidization' has encouraged the development of the leader focus in communications, a concurrent attempt to frustrate this desire for scandal has been a driving force in the further centralization of control by professional cadres within parties. These effects, and their contributing factors, will be considered in more depth below, but Dahlgren's reminder to look at the effects of both acceptances and rejections is well taken.

It is impossible to ignore the effects of the media on political actors. Yet even if the effects are seen to be negative ones, and the extent to which this may or may not be true remains to be seen, it is not so simple as to say that political parties should simply stop being so dependent on the media. Even if this was possible, there is another force at work here that is contributing to the reliance of political parties on the media for access to voters, one that is amplifying the above-mentioned effects of media logics. Parties are changing structurally, and this structural change is closely tied to shifts in the wider social context in which they operate.

Political Communication and Modernity

While the above-noted authors highlight the ways in which the media is growing in influence, through growing independence and power vis-à-vis political parties, there is a second process occurring here which is at play in the growing dependence of political parties on the media to reach voters. For proponents of the *modernization* camp it is not merely this dependence, but rather the process of modernization that drives it, that many authors (Panebianco 1988; Mancini 1999; Blumler and Kavanagh 1999; Negrine 2008) argue lies at the center of the professionalization of politics.

These authors see two key factors at work in this move: while on the one hand, they recognize the effects of the development of mass media discussed earlier, on the other hand they argue that the effects of changes in the structure of society need to be given greater credit. At this level, they suggest that the erosion of class divisions, the increasing standard of living, and the individualizing tendencies of the modern era – along with the numerous other effects laid out in modernization theories (c.f. Ritzer 1993) – have undercut the ideological base on which the parties relied. Though the economic aspects of these changes are argued to have mainly affected parties on the left of the spectrum, the breakdown of traditional cultural values, whether religious or otherwise, is seen to have left many other parties in no better situations (Panebianco 1988). According to this argument, political parties are no more immune to the shifting forces of modernization than any other part of society. As differentiation and rationalization shift the ways in which people relate to one another at work, at home, and in Putnam's (2000) bowling leagues, so too they affect the ways in which they relate to one another in the political realm.

One of the most recent expressions of this view can be found in the work of Ralph Negrine (2008; Negrine et al. 2007), who examines the professionalization trend present in the evolution of the party from the mass membership party through the 'electoral-professional' form and eventually to its current culmination in the 'cartel party'. Drawing on the work of Mayhew (1997) and Panebianco (1988), Negrine argues that the changes in society which came along with modernization and differentiation created a situation where the old party structures could no longer continue to function as they had. In this context

the attractions of catch-all parties [electoral-professional or cartel] appear obvious: when traditional cleavages such as class and religion are no longer determinants of political behaviour and when ideological divisions begin to matter less, political parties may find it necessary to appeal to non-traditional supporters ... In doing so, political parties inevitably eschew strong ideological

positions in favour of positions with broad electoral appeal. Consequently, political parties cease to connect strongly with their – admittedly declining – traditional base of support, and vie with one another to represent the mass electorate. (2008:61)

Negrine (2008) suggests that this process can be seen to be occurring as early as the 1970s. While the mass membership party that had existed since the expansion of the franchise was dependent on high and relatively stable memberships, over the 1970s and 1980s the allegiances of party members began to deteriorate. This left parties in the unenviable position of declining memberships and a loss of their support base, combined with an increasing number of volatile voters who needed to be courted at election time. This combination of factors resulted in the need for the party to shift in form to what Panebianco has termed the ‘electoral-professional’ party, one in which “a major role is played by professionals who are more useful when the organization moves its center of gravity from members to voters” (1988:481).

Those in the modernization camp argue that this occurred because of the fact that, as party memberships decline, parties are faced with an increasing difficulty in obtaining the labour necessary for the style of campaigning on which the mass membership party was dependent. The door-to-door style of labour-intensive and low-skill campaigning may have been less financially costly than the media-based campaign of the professional party, but it required huge numbers of volunteers and activists to carry out, a resource which is in increasingly short supply to parties facing the atrophy of traditional volunteer bases. With smaller bases, and ever increasing numbers of volatile voters, parties are increasingly forced to rely on a smaller group of paid professionals, using mass communication tactics that allow them to reach a larger pool of potential voters, to provide the outreach necessary for electoral success.

In the same way that Stromback identifies a difference between the second and third stages in his model, where the mediatization process may be underway but the field remains contested, and the fourth stage, where the values of the media logic have been internalized to such a degree that the fact of conflict may go unnoticed, Katz and Mair (1995) draw a distinction between Panebianco's 'electoral-professional' party and what they term a 'cartel' party. In the latter form, there is the greatest degree of separation between the central party, with its professional consultants and technicians, and the membership. Moreover, in many cases these parties have adapted the very rules of the game to preserve their advantage and existence, through barriers to entry for new parties and eventually the institutionalization of parties within the state apparatus by way of central state funding. The latter adaptation goes so far as to remove the need for parties to rely upon members even for their financial existence. This institutionalization of parties as the key actors in politics has not gone unnoticed by its critics. In one critique that identifies the denigration of politics as the direct consequence of this form of political organization, Gary Woodward argues that:

By defining politics as a conflict among parties we have seemingly stripped away a sense of direct membership ... we are not citizens but 'targets' to be motivated with self-serving political ads and direct-mail appeals ... With voting treated as just another form of manipulated consumer behaviour it is little wonder that many do not find it rewarding. (2007:16)

The longer term effects of this sort of organization will be examined in more detail later, but for now it is enough to recognize that these changes have effects beyond the question of electoral success.

Though there appears to be an obvious relationship between the process of modernization and the evolution of political communication tactics, there are several weaknesses of the model presented above that need to be acknowledged. First, any discussion of modernization and its

attendant effects risks taking a deterministic stance: the effects of modernization are seen as unavoidable, though they may at times be acknowledged as regrettable. This is most readily apparent in the work of Norris (2004) and of Blumler and Kavanagh (1999), both of whom construct models of the development of political parties that are problematic. In the case of the former, the reliance on the framing of this development as passing through “premodern”, “modern”, and “post-modern” stages leaves the impression that parties’ structures at each stage are somehow appropriate to certain time periods or developmental stages. In the case of the latter, though Blumler and Kavanagh avoid such loaded terminology, there is an equal danger of determinism in their link between technological development and the changing ‘ages’ of political communication. Not only does the assumption of the necessity of such changes lay too much at the feet of a deterministic view of technological development, but it also has the effect of masking some faulty causal arguments that ignore the conscious choices of parties in terms of adoption of new strategies and technologies.

A second weakness which is shared by some authors in both the mediatization and modernization camps lies in the difficulty of answering questions regarding the continuity or discontinuity of the processes outlined above. Are these developments merely quantitative changes in the degree to which parties carry out actions which were always present, or are there qualitative leaps which can be identified at certain points in time? As Seymour-Ure points out in 1977, in response to comments that television had produced a new kind of politics by distorting common practices,

Politics has no existence apart from the communications media prevalent in society. ... With mass politics and modern technology, forms of political communication have necessarily changed. TV is the prevalent medium and inevitably tends to impose its own manners on its subjects. This is not to

'distort' politics, for there have never been politics that were not conditioned by the dominant media of the day. (cited in Negrine 2008:20)

Negrine (2008) himself identifies the difficulty of answering this question in many cases, pointing out the reality that historical examples of similar tactics present real difficulties to theorists who posit changing ages or stages. Yet though the question of continuity and discontinuity is an interesting one for such models, it is relatively unimportant for this analysis. The issue at hand is not the continuity of the change, but rather what the effects of this change are.

Processes and Effects

Neither of these processes, mediatization or modernization, can be analyzed alone. Furthermore, the effects of these processes stem from aspects recognized by both camps, and the remainder of this chapter will focus on laying out these effects. Throughout the literature that examines changing trends in political communication over the last century, these effects, though they vary widely, are readily apparent in three key areas: the centralization of control, the personalization or leader-focus of communication, and the shift from labour-intensive to capital-intensive campaign strategies.

The centralization of control

The first trend in the transformation of political communication over the post-war period revolves around the increasing centralization of control within parties. This evolving practice shows clear evidence of impacts from both of the processes discussed above, with both evolutions in the party structure, and adaptations to the media environment playing key roles in this centralization. In terms of structure, there is a clear requirement within the electoral-professional party, and to an even greater extent in the cartel party, for technically experienced staff. This occurs for several reasons. First, the increasing importance in these two forms of

initially the ‘long campaign’ and ultimately the ‘permanent campaign’ makes increased central staffing a necessity. While volunteers can be called upon for a four-week period, it becomes significantly harder to rely upon their commitment and availability for a campaign that begins to extend significant distances into the period between elections. Additionally, the media-driven need to keep a coherent message throughout the region (as well as to adapt to changing circumstances) demands a central body which is able to make such decisions with the speed required by the 24-hour modern news cycle.

A demonstration of the centralizing influence of professional staff can be found in the 1993 documentary *The War Room* (Hedegus & Pennebaker), with its focus on the degree of centralization and power at the heart of the 1992 Clinton presidential campaign. In this campaign, the key staff members in research, communication, ad design, strategy, and operations were kept in close contact, allowing a rapid response to changing circumstances. This practice has now become commonplace in Western campaigns, a fact highlighted by Warren Kinsella (2001) in the Canadian context. While the Clinton campaign is only one example, it is emblematic of a trend that Farrell and Webb (2000:117-118) identify across liberal democracies. Yet the development of the ‘war room’ does not merely illustrate a shift in personnel – as such staff take on increasingly influential roles in terms of the making of strategic choices, it has the tendency to begin to concentrate power in the centre, contributing to what Farrell and Webb see as the steady decline of local party organizations.

While the increased numbers of professional staff play a role in the centralization of control, Agre (2002) argues – based on the work of Harold Innis (1951) – that the development of new technologies that increase ease of access to the peripheries also contributes to this increase in centralization. Agre’s argument makes the point that the sheer ability to stay in touch

with, and keep tabs on the actions of, each candidate and region reduces regional autonomy and increases central oversight. This raises the issue of the role that technological development plays as necessary, if not in all cases sufficient, for the evolution of political parties. In the case of Agre's argument, it is not merely the development of modern communication technologies that allow for central oversight of the peripheries that play a role. The development of polling techniques is another piece of the puzzle, as not only is this required to properly design the type of unidirectional communication tactics that centralized campaigns increasingly rely on, but the expense related to polling is still at a level that puts it beyond the means of individual ridings or candidates in the Canadian context⁵, again shifting the balance of power in favour of the centre, as the only body capable of carrying out these polls.

Intriguingly, the history of centralization within political parties provides an example of how, when motivated to, political parties are in fact able to adapt in an attempt to limit the negative impacts of certain changes in tactics. When centralization first occurs within parties, though it provides a greater degree of message discipline, it would seem to also have the effect of eliminating the ability of politicians and parties to tailor their messages to regional differences. Particularly in the case of a country with as much regional and demographic diversity as Canada, a one-size-fits-all campaign message has the potential to be fatal. However, with the introduction of polling and micro-targeting technologies a single central body is able to target specific (and diverse) messages to identified groups. Though there are still limits on the degree of targeting that can be performed, and though this only deals with one of the negative effects of this

⁵ This is not true to the same extent in the American context, which may play a role in what is seen as the greater independence of individual candidates from their political parties in that context.

centralization of control, it does provide evidence that parties need not necessarily resign themselves to the negative effects of modern campaigning techniques.

As mentioned earlier, the above-noted changes in party structure provide part, but not all, of the impetus behind the centralization of control in modern parties. Another key role is played by the increasing mediatization of campaigns, and in particular the demands placed on parties by the increased scrutiny of the modern media environment. The increasingly general evening news programs of major networks, as well as cost-saving measures by major newspaper chains that see a growing number of columns written by central staff and provided to all affiliated papers across the country, have led to a shift in focus towards parties rather than individual candidates, thus increasing the importance of both leaders (which will be considered in the next section) and central party organizations. National news organizations tend to eschew individual MPs (unless their disagreement with central policy can be made into a story itself) in favour of a central set of contacts and sources within parties themselves.

In addition, the increased scrutiny of the media, as well as the tabloidization of much coverage, with its focus on drama and scandal, has raised the stakes for parties. Gibson and Rommele (2001) identify the role this plays in the centralization of control within parties, arguing that “the opportunities for internal restructuring and communication control strengthens parties’ ability to control their message to members and muzzle those vote-losing voices of extremism” (40). Particularly in a first-past-the-post system where the shift of a few percent can lead to the gain or loss of power, this form of rigid discipline in the face of a scandal-hungry media is increasingly necessary for those at the centre.

The leader as focus

As noted above, while centralization occurs on an organizational level, a parallel process is taking place with respect to the public face of the party. Swanson and Mancini (1996a) are among the many who argue that, to a large extent, the roots of this growing personalization of politics can be found in the demands of the media environment. The media, due in part to their own increasing centralization and uniformity, demand a narrative that fits certain rules, one of which is the need for the central symbol around which coverage can be based – a role taken up quickly by political leaders. The growing need for a symbolic centre heightens the profile of those at the core of the party, increasing the profile of the leader and blurring the distinction within voters' minds between the party and the leader. As Blumler (1990) argues, “a leader-seeking media system promotes a leader-elevated political system” (106). This leader focus in parties is thus a case of, in many ways, merely “giving the media what they want” (Blumler 1990:160). There is no desire to cover Member of Parliament #113, as there would be little interest in the story outside of that member's riding. The lone exception to this, of course, is in the case that he or she has said or done something that challenges or embarrasses the leader. This exception proves the rule, however, as even this story is more about the leader's response than the member in question.

This personalization, however, is not merely the public image equivalent of the centralization of parties, as there are other forces at work beyond the demands of a media environment that is increasingly centralized itself. Dahlgren (2009:41) argues that the commercial imperatives of the media sphere, with its need for constant entertainment to maintain market share, have led to the ‘tabloidization’ of journalism – a news media that is driven by drama and personal stories as opposed to ideological differences between parties. This

tabloidization, or as David Remnick (2005) termed it ‘political porn’, is based more on sensation than fact, and is increasingly treating the leaders of parties as minor celebrities, with a growing focus on any potentially scandalous aspects of their personal lives.

It’s important to acknowledge the differences here between the Canadian and American contexts. While Dalton, McAllister and Wattenberg (2000) argue that the advent of TV in the U.S. reduced the reliance of candidates on parties to get their messages out, and encouraged personalization at the local level, this hasn’t happened to the same extent here, perhaps due in part to the fact that districts within Canada are both geographically larger, covering multiple media markets, and significantly smaller in population, providing less financial means for such a costly campaigning strategy. As well, while an individual can run with little institutional party support and yet build a following through media and public support in the U.S., the parliamentary system leaves more power in the hands of party whips in Canada, while party elites since 1975 have also maintained a veto over candidate nominations, and to a varying extent still have control over leadership races. In addition, the individual focus caused by the nature of the presidency south of the border leads to a great deal more emphasis on the personal characteristics of those vying for it. Yet it needs to be acknowledged that though this personal focus may have developed more quickly in the US (after all, Canadians have yet to experience their own Starr report), the Canadian context is not wholly different. While Canadian candidates may not have taken to the personalization of campaigning to same extent as their U.S. counterparts, leaders of parties here have been able to do so to a greater extent. Post-Stephane Dion, and the Conservative Party’s ‘Not a Leader’ campaign, the need for leaders who can serve as public faces for their parties was more widely discussed and acknowledged even in Canada. The degree to which the NDP’s recent success has been laid at the feet of the late Jack Layton,

and the debate around the degree to which his health concerns should have been communicated to the public, suggest that this personalization has continued to grow. This has the additional effect of decreasing leaders' reliance on the party organization, shifting the balance of power within parties in favour of leaders (c.f. Martin 2010).

Yet this is not entirely a one-way effect, with the media being held up as solely responsible for the personalization or tabloidization of political coverage, and the parties seen as merely adapting to their demands. Changes in parties themselves have a role in this process as well. The move from the mass-membership to the electoral-professional and cartel parties set in motion a shift from strong ideological differences between parties to growing similarities in policies and platforms. As parties moved to the centre in the effort to sway non-aligned voters, this shift forced a change in campaigning from policy-based campaigns to marketing campaigns that began to prioritize image and style over manifesto. While a policy campaign is to a large degree possible without a strong central figure, a party is too much of an amorphous entity to easily build an image/style based campaign around. This type of campaign instead requires a single symbolic figure upon which to place the focus, which in turn amplifies the electoral effects of the popularity or lack of popularity of a given leader. The central place of popular leaders in modern campaign ads and literature gives clear evidence of this.

Capital and labour

There is a third trend at work here, one which is intricately intertwined with the two trends above. Over the post-war period, and as the twin processes of mediatization and modernization have occurred, a number of authors (c.f. Swanson and Mancini 1996b; Negrine et al 2007; Negrine 2008) argue that a steady shift can be seen, with an increasing degree of money

and effort put towards new capital-intensive tactics and a commensurate decrease in emphasis on the labour-hungry tactics of the older ground campaign.

As mentioned in the modernization section above, political parties have been forced to come to terms with the same decrease in popular engagement that has confronted many social organizations (Putnam 2000). Negrine (2008:63) points to this decreasing availability of labour as one of the key drivers for many of the tactical changes made towards increased professionalization by political parties. At the same time, political parties have increasingly developed their fundraising apparatus, in some cases including the institution of political party financing within the state apparatus itself, and are thus able to mount the kind of capital-intensive campaigns which have become commonplace. In the face of decreasing numbers of active members with which to carry out the labour-hungry strategies of door-to-door persuasive canvassing, community action, or mainstreeting, political parties have embraced new technologies that allow a limited number of central staff to vastly increase the number of individuals they can contact directly. Automated phone messages, telephone town halls, interactive voice broadcasts complete with the ability to register comments and concerns – all of these techniques require an increased expenditure of capital, which parties have to a greater degree than in the past, but far less of the resource they are increasingly short of, volunteer labour.

Air war vs. ground war

Though those operating in the field of political communication and organizing may not in all cases be aware of the larger historical context of these changes, the interaction of these trends is recognized by practitioners in terms of the increasing use by political parties of tactics that fall within the realm of what is known as the *air war*. In simplest terms, the air war includes things

such as centralized ad campaigns, leaders' tours, debates, and interactive voice broadcasts, as well as the mass-produced leaflets that are mailed to the homes of every registered voter. The flip side of these air war tactics are those that fall within the realm of the *ground war*. The ground war is by its very nature local, and issues are generally geared towards those of importance in the area. In contrast, the large area of effect of air war tactics requires that control be centralized, ensuring that messages in one area don't conflict with those in another. Where the ground war is labour-intensive, requiring a massive volunteer base and time commitment in order to allow for the door-to-door canvassing, mainstreeting, and community action which are key to it, the air war is instead capital-intensive, requiring substantial sums of money to carry out (as an example, in the heavily media-based climate of American elections, there are very few congressional districts left which can be realistically contested for less than \$1 million⁶). The differences in labour requirements go beyond just numbers though – while the ground war relies on many volunteers, the air war requires few, but highly skilled, technicians.

These differences begin to explain the reasons why modern cartel parties are increasingly dependent on the tactics of the air war for campaigns. The assets which the modern party organization has in abundance – capital, highly-skilled central office professionals, centralization of control and messaging – are the very same things required to run a successful air war campaign. On the other hand, the ground campaign, with its requirements for local direction and large volunteer bases, is increasingly difficult for parties with dropping membership enrolments and commitment to carry out effectively. As Negrine argues, “the fewer the foot soldiers of the

⁶ Since the 2010 census, the average population of a congressional district is 710,767 (U.S. Census Bureau 2012), roughly 6½ times the average Canadian riding, though the variation between provinces means the 111,166 (Elections Canada 2012a) average can vary significantly. By contrast, spending limits for Canadian ridings in 2012 tended to be in the \$85,000-100,000 range (Elections Canada 2012b), though again the variations in population mean that spending limits varied from riding to riding.

party, the more intensive the media-directed campaign at [the] national and sometimes local level” (2008:63).

While the shift to the air war may be understandable in terms of the changing face of party organizations, it’s important to realize that this process has a tendency to reinforce its own necessity. Though the increased availability of paid professionals allows for the use of campaigning tools with higher technical skill requirements, as many of the air war tactics do, from television commercials to mail campaigns, Swanson and Mancini (1996a) argue that the prevalence of such tactics begins to necessitate the involvement of these paid professionals to an even larger extent, sidelining members and volunteers even further. Where a door-to-door campaign could once have been run by a team of passionate amateurs, an air-war campaign requires a significantly higher capital investment, the kind of 24/7 staff required by a 24/7 news cycle, and the availability of skilled technicians to carry it out.

The authors cited thus far present strong arguments for how the three trends above – the centralization of control, the increased leader-focus, and the growing reliance on capital-intensive rather than labour-intensive tactics – result from the processes of mediatization and modernization outlined at the beginning of the chapter. And indeed it is easy to see in many ways how the shift, for example, through first radio and television to the modern 24-hour news cycle is implicated in the growing centralization of messaging and control in political parties. After all, when the sole purpose of the news media begins to appear to be the search for any inconsistency, any chink in the armour of unity, it’s hardly surprising that this armour is thickened, and the degree of local campaign flexibility suffers. However, some caution is advisable in interpreting

these developments as merely the result of either a modernization or mediatization of the political environment.

First, these three trends are not distinct from one another, rather they are interwoven such that developments in one area often create added pressure on the others. As is evident in the case of the growing reliance on the air war, the increasing centralization of control is both necessary for, and encouraging of, the use of capital-intensive techniques over labour-intensive ones. In much the same way, the shift in favour of capital-intensive techniques lends weight to the personalization and leader-focused nature of political communication, insofar as an increasingly unified message lends itself to a unified symbol and focus that is easier to mass distribute. As a result, these trends are in many ways both responses to the processes of modernization and mediatization, and also the effects of earlier responses to these processes.

But these interactional effects raise a further question, namely to what extent this can truly be viewed as a one-way effect, with modernization and mediatization as pre-determined causal factors, to which all else must necessarily adapt. Instead, the question needs to be raised as to what role these adaptations on the part of political parties play in moving these processes along – to what extent is mediatization not merely the cause of, but also a response to, the growing media-savvy of political parties? An example may serve to illustrate the need for caution in this interpretation. Scammell (1999), in her consideration of trends in political marketing, gives the increasing volatility of the electorate as a central reason for the shift towards professionalization in political parties. This makes sense, of course, as decreasing partisan numbers affect the availability of volunteers and labour while simultaneously increasing the importance of reaching an ever-greater number of voters who could potentially be swayed. But this argument ignores the fact that there is a very real possibility that the actions taken by parties

are themselves creating, or at the very least reinforcing, this volatility. Regardless of what the original impetus for the initial increase in volatility may have been – and I would agree with Negrine’s (2008) analysis of this as tied, at least in part, to the destabilization of traditional cleavages as a result of modernization – the shift towards marketing decreases the need for volunteer labour, removing one of the means by which partisan supporters can be brought into contact with party, and their loyalty strengthened. Thus the response to the situation serves to reinforce the original problem, creating a potential for a feedback loop – a confluence of increasing volatility and increasing need for professionalization that begins to perpetuate and amplify itself.

In any case, the processes and trends outlined above represent the general aspects of professionalization identified by authors looking at large scale changes in political communication. However, though there are numerous studies which explore the changing nature of political communication, focusing on these types of trends and the forces which drive them, it would be a gross oversimplification to suggest that this trend exists in the same way, and to the same degree, in all places. In particular, the effects of these changing tactics on the viability and success of progressive parties remains an understudied area, and one which Panitch (2001) notes is badly needed. In the next two chapters, the work of several pre-eminent theorists will be brought to bear on this process of professionalization, with the goal of exposing some of the theoretical effects of this shift.

Chapter 3

Relational Politics – Habermas & Gramsci

As laid out in the previous chapter, the shift to the air war can be seen as emblematic of the professionalization that is under way in the political communication and organizing tactics of parties. What is of interest for progressives, however, is what the effects of this shift may be on the movement and party itself. In this chapter, an examination of the work of Jurgen Habermas on communications theory will allow for a consideration of the effects on both the persuasiveness of arguments and the relationship between party and audience of this shift towards unidirectional forms of communication and away from the more interactive tactics of the ground war campaign. Building on this, the work of Antonio Gramsci will provide insight into the consequences of these relational changes for the structure of modern parties, as well as their effectiveness in creating the change they pursue. These themes will be expanded on in the following chapter, as the work of Chiara Bottici, George Lakoff and others will be used to consider the ways in which the expansion of the field of study beyond the rational aspects of communication opens up further understandings of the effects of this professionalization.

Habermas – Communication and Strategy

In order to lay the necessary foundation for the use of Habermas' work to examine this professionalization, a brief consideration of the core aspects of Habermas' theory of communicative action is in order. Habermas' (1984, 1987) theory of communicative action, as it applies to the democratic context, is predicated on a belief in the potential of communication as a universal form of legitimation. In this vein, he argues that the potential of communication to create a space built upon what Habermas terms the 'non-coercive coercion' of the better argument, the only legitimate form of persuasion in the democratic context, epitomized by the *ideal speech situation* (ISS). The ISS, recognized as a counterfactual utopia, but still useful on a theoretical level, represents a situation wherein two communicatively competent individuals

enter into a reasoned debate with the goal of arriving at an understanding, both actors agreeing to respect the force of the better argument. Though Habermas has been criticized for the impossibility (or even undesirability) of this situation⁷, what is of interest for the purposes of this paper is not the achievability of this ideal, but the insights into communicative theory that it is based on, and those that extend from it.

The structure of speech

Central to Habermas' understanding of the liberating potential of communication is a feature he describes as the double structure of speech (1979). Through this double structure, Habermas argues that the utterances used in communication can be seen to be made up of two distinct aspects, the illocutionary and propositional components. The latter provides the content of an utterance – the information being transmitted from speaker to listener – while it is the former (which represents what Habermas refers to as the *performative* aspect that forms the relationship between speaker and listener) that allows the statement to have force. This illocutionary force, predicated on the existence of the intersubjective relationship, is what provides the speaker with the ability to bring about a desired response in the listener.

For example, in order for a speaker (S) to achieve a desired response in a listener (L) by promising to do (A), several conditions must be satisfied. First, L must believe that S is likely to indeed do A, and also that it would be right/desirable for A to be done. This is where the relationship aspect comes in. L can understand the propositional content – that S is promising to do A in exchange for a certain response from L – but in order for L to believe that S will indeed

⁷ Critiques of this idea stem primarily from two directions – some feminists (c.f. Fraser 1989) argue that the prioritization of rationality and the subject ignores the embodied nature of power relations, while postmodern critiques (c.f. Lyotard, 1984) of Habermas tend to attack the universalist tones of his argument as authoritarian.

keep her word, the speech act must build the intersubjective relationship that provides the basis for this belief. But how is this relationship formed?

Habermas argues that this is done through the presence of three validity claims that are made in every speech act, as well as through the implicit promise to provide substantiation or support for these claims should they be questioned. These three validity claims are claims to truth, truthfulness/sincerity, and normative rightness (a fourth claim, that of comprehensibility, is not limited to the illocutionary aspect but is rather a requirement for the success of any speech act – its presence is required in any successful communication but is not of interest in the context of this study). In linking these claims to the illocutionary force of an argument, Habermas argues that

The illocutionary force of a speech act consists in its capacity to move a hearer to act under the premise that the engagement signaled by the speaker is seriously meant ... in the case of institutionally unbound speech acts, the speaker can develop this force by inducing the recognition of validity claims. Speaker and hearer can reciprocally motivate one another to recognize validity claims because the content of the speaker's engagement is determined by a specific reference to a thematically stressed validity claim. (1979:65)

The first claim, to truth, Habermas argues (1979:63-65), represents the claim by the speaker to be accurately representing objective reality. If brought into question, the speaker can resort to the level of experience to substantiate the validity of this claim. In the second case, truthfulness/sincerity, the claim is made by the speaker to be accurately representing their subjective reality. In the case of the promise above, this would represent the speaker's honest representation of their willingness to do A in exchange for the listener's response. If questioned, this claim could be substantiated by the speaker referencing past examples of trustworthiness or sincerity, but at the deepest level this claim can only be substantiated after the fact by checking

the speaker's actual action against the promised one. The third claim, to normative rightness, represents the claim by the speaker to the belief that the statement made is a normatively correct one to make. If questioned, the claim is substantiated by reference to the underlying norm which justifies such a belief. However, this assumes a shared norm – if such is not the case, a second level of substantiation is required, at which point speaker and listener enter into the realm of discourse wherein the validity of the norm itself is debated.

An example within the political context may provide some clarity as to how this entire system is seen to work. The federal NDP may send out a flyer to eligible voters declaring “Vote NDP to stop tax cuts for the corporate welfare bums” (a theme that was common in the 1960s-70s, and echoes of which appeared in the 2011 federal election). In order for this flyer to have the desired effect, to rally support for the NDP and convince the recipient to vote correspondingly, the party must establish a sufficient intersubjective relationship with the recipient to allow the recipient to accept the claims: (1) that the NDP is telling the truth (that there are at present tax cuts being provided to corporations); (2) that the NDP is being truthful (that the party is sincere in saying that should enough people vote NDP, the party will indeed stop these tax cuts); and (3) that such a promised action would be right (that these tax cuts should be stopped, for some normatively valid and shared reason). The information communicated by the flyer can be comprehended by the recipient so long as it is printed or communicated in a form or language in which the recipient is sufficiently competent, but in order for this information to have the desired effect on the listener the illocutionary aspect must form an intersubjective relationship that allows for the validity claims to be accepted.

So how does this intersubjective relationship come about? For Habermas, the answer to this is located in the work undertaken by George Herbert Mead to study the psychological

development of individuals. In his *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas (1984, 1987) draws upon Mead's work to explain the ways in which the developing individual begins to take on two other roles in addition to that of the self, or *ego*. Without veering too far beyond the scope of this paper and into the realm of developmental psychology, the basic thrust of the argument is that the roles are gained in two stages of development, what Mead termed the 'play' stage and the 'game' stage. In the first, the individual (A) engaged in conversation, *ego*, begins to become able to take on the role of the other participant (B) in conversation, *alter*. This allows A to see herself from the perspective of B, as well as to imagine the interests at work behind the statements made by B. In the next stage, the 'game' stage, A must become able to take on not merely the roles of *ego* and *alter*, but also that of the objective observer of the relationship between participants. It is through this role that A becomes aware of the relationship between A and B in conversation, the underlying rules and assumptions, and the possibility of their extension beyond the particular situation as generalizable to all individuals engaged in similar situations.

Though the necessity of this role-taking for social and psychological development may be easily evident, it is the necessity of these roles for communicative action that is of interest here. For Habermas, there is a direct connection between the ability to take on these roles, of speaker, hearer, and observer, and the ability to satisfy the validity claims outlined above. While the first validity claim, that of truth, can be satisfied by an individual in the first-person role of speaker, the second validity claim, of truthfulness, requires a check on the intention of the other participant. This check can only be performed by a speaker also able to take on the second-person role, that of the hearer. Finally, the third validity claim, that of the normative validity of the statement, requires an ability to move beyond the specific context of the conversation

between individuals, and thus requires that the speaker/hearer be able to additionally take on the third person role of observer, able to generalize beyond the specific conversation.

Communicative action vs. strategic action

In order to move beyond this consideration of Habermas's communication theory and use his writing to look at the effects of the growing reliance on professionalized tactics such as the air war, one further distinction in his work needs to be understood. Habermas's approach to communication (1984, 1987) makes a distinction between communicative action and strategic action, and it is in the differences between these two that productive insights can be found. The first of these, communicative action, is seen by Habermas as communication oriented towards reaching *mutual understanding*. On the other hand, strategic action refers to communication acts that are oriented instead towards achieving a *particular end*.

This distinction, between communication oriented toward reaching a particular end, and action oriented towards reaching mutual understanding requires further specification, as even the pursuit of mutual understanding is a goal, and thus both strategic and communicative action can be seen as teleological acts. The true distinction between the two lies not in the presence or absence of a goal, but in the means by which the goal is pursued. Habermas's words in reference to strategic action here are crucial, as he refers to it as the "communication of those who have *only* the realization of their own ends in view" (1984:95 my emphasis). The emphasized term, 'only', is crucial, as there is no intention of arguing that those who pursue communicative action are in some way free of personal agendas. Rather, in the context of strategic action there is no limit to the means by which an actor may pursue her end, while in the situation of communicative action all actors have (or are at least assumed to have) agreed to operate within the rules of the communicative situation, wherein the only force accepted is that of the better

argument. As Niemi (2005) argues, the difference for Habermas is that “a strategic use of language attempts to accomplish the problem of action coordination through an exertion of *influence*, while a communicative use of language tries to achieve the same through a process of *reaching understanding*” (517).

The distinction between the exertion of influence or force to achieve a strategic end and the communicative attempt to reach agreement is also visible in the difference between the stances of actors engaged in communicative or strategic action. In the context of Habermas’ theory, as laid out above, there are two distinct ways in which the speaker can be oriented towards the listener which correspond respectively to strategic and communicative actions. In the case of the communicative act the speaker assumes what Habermas refers to as the ‘performative’ stance (1979). In this stance the speaker is making statements that are open to challenge, and that in the case of challenge she is prepared to defend. This is done, as noted above, through reference to the validity claims implicit in such statements, claims which must be substantiated by the speaker upon request. Conversely, in the case of the strategic act, the speaker is oriented towards the listener as towards an *object*, rather than an *alter*. Statements made in this case are not attempts to create a shared understanding, but rather are attempts to elicit a desired response in the listener – as Niemi points out, the addressee is treated “as part of the objective world who can be either forced or manipulated – ‘influenced’ – according to [the speaker’s] will” (2005:520).

One further concept is worth noting here. Beyond the broad concepts of strategic and communicative action, Habermas (2001) also identifies what he refers to as systematically distorted communication. In this case, one or more of the validity claims (to truth, truthfulness, or normative validity) upon which communicative action relies are violated, and yet

communication continues with both parties acting as though these claims were met. Significant pathologies and distortions can result from this. This raises an interesting question as to the effects of this sort of failure to obtain (or even attempt to obtain) the conditions of mutual understanding in a situation where the institutional norms require that communication meet the rules of communicative action. The long-term pathological effects of this situation on political debates and discussions in both the legislative context and the wider public sphere, though beyond the scope of this paper, are worthy of serious consideration.

Strategic action and the air war

If communicative action is focused on a goal of achieving mutual understanding, while strategic action represents an exertion of influence, then in the political context we can similarly consider the difference between (a) communication oriented towards enabling or furthering the possibilities for democratic discussion – seeing in this discussion the attempt to reach mutual understanding – and (b) communication oriented towards reducing the possibility of such in order to exert influence through other means. Taking this distinction as a departure point, I would go a step further and suggest that if we look back to the earlier discussion of the differences between the air war and the ground war, a useful parallel can be drawn, with communicative action best represented by the ground war, while strategic action, with its focus on the limitation of discussion and debate in favour of other forms of influence, can be found most clearly in the air war.

An important caveat - it should be noted that the parallel between Habermas's strategic and communicative action and the air war-ground war distinction is not perfect, nor is it in reality possible to distinguish perfectly between the two types of political communication, as elements of each tend to co-exist in the actions of political parties. Instead what is intended here

is a consideration of the air war and ground war as ideal types – a useful tool by which to identify aspects of the actions of political parties that lean in one direction or another, and to consider the effects of these aspects.

The air war, like strategic action, is oriented towards the achievement of a single goal, the marketing of a product, not the development of the possibility for discussion and debate. From a Habermasian perspective, its treatment of the voter as an object, rather than as an alter, demonstrates that its only concern is instrumental – the delivery of the plurality of voters for a given election. The limits of broadcast ads, for example, require them to be like this. The arguments presented in a 30-second ad spot, due to the limitations of such a communication, tend not to be oriented towards sparking or encouraging debate on an issue. Speaking from experience working within election campaign teams, debate is the last thing desired by political operatives when crafting an ad that will reach someone in a context in which they cannot respond to any questions that might arise, and in fact a great deal of attention goes into ensuring that ads are crafted in such a way as to minimize the creation of such questions in the viewer. Rather than creating the context or relationship needed for Habermas's attempt to reach mutual understanding, these ads tend to work to narrow the field of debate. Furthermore, their reliance on emotion would be seen by Habermas to be an improper attempt to bring influence beyond that of the best argument – though this will be questioned and the effects of this particular medium will be expanded upon further in the next chapter.

In contrast, the ground war, by its nature, allows for (though does not always entail) an attempt to develop consensus through debate. As discussed earlier, this is not to argue that the ground war, or communicative action, is in some way non-teleological. Whatever the means being used, the goal of political parties remains electoral success. But the methods of the ground

war are quite different from the air war. The candidate at the door who spends time discussing the motivation behind their beliefs, the party activist who is willing to debate the issues with a potential supporter, or the ‘neighbourhood dinners’ held by Obama ground campaign organizers in the lead up to the ’08 election all allow for communicative action in that each provides the opportunity to create agreement through the strength of the better argument, in addition to serving the goal of delivering a voter on election day. Where the realities of the air war require message crafters to attempt to limit the likelihood that pamphlets or ads will begin discussions, the realities of the ground war demand those discussions. The candidate who stands on a doorstep mouthing platitudes and ignoring the reaction of the voter she is talking to is unlikely to win that voter over to her camp. For this reason, campaigns engaged in training volunteers for the ground war focus on tactics to draw voters into discussion, relying on a belief that their argument has the potential to convince on the strength of its merits.

The parallels between the air war and strategic action, on the one hand, and the ground war and communicative action, on the other, are further apparent upon consideration of Habermas’s discussion of the different ‘stances’ of actors in such contexts. The actor in the ground war can be seen to be taking on the performative stance, as she is willing to accept challenge of her statements on the basis of the underlying validity claims, and to provide substantiation for these claims. In the case of the air war, in contrast, the actor is oriented towards the audience in an objective manner, attempting to bring about a desired response through the use of influence.

This shift from the ground to air war, and the parallel shift in the actions of political parties from communicative to strategic action, is one that is remarked upon by Habermas (1988) in his lament over the transformation of the public sphere in advanced capitalist societies.

The principle of publicity, which initially, on the basis of a public constituted by cultivated, reasoning private persons, capable of enjoying art, asserted, in the medium of the bourgeois press, an unambiguously critical function vis-a-vis the secretiveness which was the praxis of the absolutist state. And for this principle a foundation was secured in the procedures of the constitutional organs; but subsequently it has been transformed in its function for demonstrative and manipulative ends. The ever more densely strung communications network of the electronic mass media today is organized in such a manner that it controls the loyalty of a depoliticized population, rather than serving to make the social and state controls in turn subject to a decentralized and uninhibited discursive formation of the public will, channelled in such a way as to be of consequence – and this in spite of the technical potential for liberation which this technology represents. (P.4)

Relational breakdown

So if we accept that a parallel can be drawn between the air war-ground war and Habermas' development of the strategic action-communicative action paradigm, the question then becomes – what effects of the shift identified in the previous chapter can be exposed from this perspective?

The first thing that can be seen from this view is that the shift to strategic action leads to a breakdown of the relationship aspect of communication. Since the intersubjective nature of communication requires that communication occur between subjects, when the listener is approached as an object, rather than as alter, the intersubjective aspect is of necessity discarded. We must remember that to Habermas, after all, for communication to be successful it requires that both parties have the ability to engage in discussion wherein each party is able to take on three roles, to be ego, alter, and objective observer. It is this ability that enables them to ask for clarification, to question, and to challenge the validity claims and request that the speaker sustain them. Without the ability to move between each of these roles, and to make these challenges to the underlying validity claims, the interpretive negotiation fails – communicative action is abandoned for strategic, instrumentalized action. In this way air war communication becomes

unidirectional – political parties talk at, rather than with, audiences. This is readily apparent in the broadcast nature of air war communication – the individual receiving a pamphlet in the mail, or watching a commercial during her hockey game is not a true participant in the communicative act.

One of the dangers of this is that when the intersubjective relationship is broken down and the individual is no longer brought into the conversation persuasion becomes significantly more difficult. One recent study comparing the efficacy of a variety of means of influencing voters across several countries (Schmitt-Beck 2004) demonstrated that in nearly all cases the impact of interpersonal conversations vastly outweighed the impact of mass media sources in terms of the effect on voters' decisions. In addition, further research has shown that the impact of air war sources can be differentiated from that of more personal interactions, with the tools of the air war serving to mobilize voters to turn out, but not serving to significantly alter their opinions as to which party to support (Campus, Pasquino and Vaccari 2008).

Political parties utilizing air war techniques use broad-based communication tools to attempt to reach as many people as possible with a unidirectional, or broadcast message. In this, they aim for two results that these types of messages can deliver. First, the goal is to deliver a higher proportion of 'your' vote. The party tries to reach as many people as possible who already see the world their way and expose them to messages that it has determined will have a high likelihood of ensuring they show up at the polling booth. In the case of the US Republican Party, for example, these messages tend towards images and videos that reference abortion, gay marriage, patriotism, or the fear of big government. In contrast, for the CCF/NDP in Canada, those images and videos have historically tended to reference the ties between corporate elites and the other two major parties (e.g. 1970s 'Corporate Welfare Bums' pamphlets), or nationalist

ads that play on the fear that these elites have an agenda that entails ‘selling out’ the country to the United States (e.g. the anti-FTA campaign in 1988). In either case, the focus is on ideas that will serve to motivate the base to cast a ballot.

A second goal is to convince a portion of those from outside of the party’s base that overlap with the party on a particular fear or belief that they need to change their vote in this election in order to prevent or enable⁸ a given outcome. A recurring example of this can be seen in Liberal Party of Canada appeals in 2004 (and since, with decreasing effectiveness in 2006 and 2008, and finally backfiring on them in 2011 as the result of a reversal of circumstances with the NDP) to NDP voters to ‘vote strategically’ in order to defeat the Conservatives and prevent a posited radical right-wing agenda⁹. Of interest here is the fact that there is little or no attempt to convince voters that they should *become* Liberals (or, in the earlier examples, NDP or Republican¹⁰). There is no significant attempt made to convince them that they should endorse a party programme or even reconsider their longer term allegiance to their current party. Instead, the focus is merely instrumental – aiming to deliver a vote for that particular election.¹¹

⁸ Usually prevent – the reason for this tendency in political ads is tied to its greater simplicity and thus increased effectiveness. The rationale for this will be examined in further detail in the next chapter.

⁹ Interestingly, in the 2011 election the strategic voting argument in fact had two distinct negative effects on the Liberal Party. Voters on the left of the party saw the rise of the NDP as necessitating a shift in their support to defeat the Conservatives, while those on the right of the party were persuaded by strategic arguments by the Conservatives that they were the only party that could keep the ‘socialist’ NDP from taking power.

¹⁰ An argument could be made that the ‘corporate welfare bums’ strategy was an exception to this and was tied into an effort to convince voters not merely to vote for the NDP, but that the NDP was the only party actively concerned with their interests – regardless, this type of advertising has tended increasingly towards delivering the vote, irrespective of the effect on the lasting impressions of the party.

¹¹ A third goal of this broadcast-style communication can be ‘voter suppression’, whereby an attempt is made to demotivate an opponents’ base in order to lower turnout of their supporters. This isn’t considered in great detail here, and the democratic validity of such a tactic is questionable at best, but it can be seen as an even more

The dangerous part of this type of focus for political parties is that success is only short term. When the move is made from communicative to strategic action, parties lessen their ability to persuade, to reach the ‘hearts and minds’ of voters in a way that has any sort of lasting effect. It is this sort of persuasion that brings disparate perspectives together, and strengthens the normative underpinnings – the values, as George Lakoff (2009) identifies them – of the parties’ arguments. But while research shows (Fishkin and Luskin 2005; Fishkin 1995) that this is indeed the result of true discussion and communication, to be successful it requires the inter-subjectivity, the give-and-take of debate, the ability to expose, question, criticize, defend, and alter the arguments involved in issues. And it is this type of inter-subjective communication which is absent in the air war.¹² The television ad may deliver a vote on Election Day, but it doesn’t increase the size of a party’s base, and in fact, in combination with the breakdown of the relationship noted above, it may be cutting into the base.

So this shift in tactics means first that the party is not renewing the relationship with its base, and second that they’re not adding new people to that base. Within the context of the ‘cartel’ party, and from the point of view of a given election, this makes sense to those making the decisions, because the strategic action focus is all about achieving the goal (the vote) rather than convincing someone of your argument. While the longer term convert may be agreed by all to be the ideal, the professionals involved in running a campaign operate from a perspective where such an ideal cannot be allowed to interfere with the primary objective of electoral

extreme case of strategic action – there is no real effort to arrive at an agreement on any principles of the party, and instead the communicative act is merely oriented to the instrumental end of lowering the opponent’s vote.

¹² Habermas (2009) makes a similar argument with respect to mass communication tactics in the media, though he doesn’t continue this analysis to the level of the actions of political parties themselves, mentioning them only as participants in a larger shift within the media culture itself. His argument, however, holds true beyond the case of the media, as the asymmetry he identifies in the mass media is paralleled by the asymmetry present in the air war.

victory. While a consideration of framing in light of the work of George Lakoff and recent developments in cognitive neuroscience in the next chapter will expose some additional problems for progressives resulting from this shift towards the air war, what is apparent at this point is that over a period of time the result is going to be a smaller base – a smaller core of people who consider themselves aligned with the party, as well as an increasingly more volatile, more difficult to persuade, and less motivated electorate. As a result, parties risk entering into a feedback loop, where decreases in bases are used to justify an increased reliance on the air war, the result of which is a further decrease in parties' bases. Those who study political parties have remarked on the evidence of this shift in numerous places, from diminishing party memberships (with the exception of leadership races) and the drop-off in inter-election engagement of those who still take out memberships to decreasing numbers of volunteers at election time (c.f. Swanson and Mancini 1996b; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). These decreases in attachment are readily acknowledged, and part of the shift to the air war, as noted in the previous chapter, has been an attempt to adapt to that reality. However, considered from the Habermasian perspective, the question is raised whether, in addition to representing responses to this effect, these adaptations are in reality exacerbating it.

Another effect of the shift to strategic action in the form of the air war, one that is increasingly remarked on by political commentators and disaffected members alike, is a loss of complexity and a concurrent blurring of ideologies. When engaged in communicative action, the parties are attempting to reach a mutual understanding with their audience – in the electoral case, they're attempting to convince voters to agree with them, to accept their view of the world and provide support for that view in the form of a ballot. The shift to merely winning votes rather than converts leads to the tactical shift apparent in the catch-all parties, or what Negrine (2008)

refers to as the cartel or electoral-professional parties. In these parties, the goal is no longer to appeal merely to traditional bases of support, and to over time attempt to increase the size of those bases. Instead, the attempt to reach beyond traditional supporters in the search for votes, rather than believers, leads to a weakening of the ideological purity of the party in favour of what can most easily be sold. There's a temptation to discard problematic ideologies, though this is usually framed in terms of short term tactics to gain power in order to carry out the party's true beliefs. In the case of the CCF/NDP, which will be considered in detail in Chapter 5, this is clear in a consideration of the shift in party platforms away from contentious issues and phrases and towards less complex central themes¹³. Once the party stops seeing its role as educating the public, or even convincing voters of the validity of their programme, and instead begins to view its sole objective as winning votes, there is little value in discussing hard topics. The party thus begins to resemble Ledru-Rollin's oft-quoted 19th century statement – “there go my people – I must find out where they are going so that I can lead them!” (cited in Rao 2011).

Using Habermas' theories as an analytical lens, the shift to unidirectional communication tactics by the modern electoral party can be seen to have the result of weakening both the persuasiveness and the complexity of political arguments, both of which lead to the blurring of ideologies noted in these catch-all parties. This, however, is only part of the effect of this unidirectionality of communication. The breakdown in the intersubjective relationship Habermas sees as necessary for the ability of political argumentation to persuade through recourse to the force of the better argument does not merely lead to the loss of persuasive power. In addition to having this effect, it also leads over time to the breakdown of the relationship between parties

¹³ For examples of this at work, consider the difference between the early Regina Manifesto and the later Winnipeg Declaration, or the 2011 federal convention debate around removing references to 'socialism' from the party's constitution.

and their supporters. The member-as-participant feels an active role in the party, and when engaged in the ground war (which requires, for its success, a small degree of activity and participation from a large number of volunteers) feels that sense of attachment to the party renewed. Instead of seeing the party as an abstract entity, the success or failure of the party becomes something which the member feels invested in. On the other hand, the member-as-audience becomes detached from the party – being treated by the party as an object, the relationship between the two is no longer intersubjective but rather that of two objects passing one another. Any interaction occurs on this object level – evidence of this can be seen in the increase in monetary donations at the same time as membership levels and active involvement in membership processes drop off precipitously.

Interestingly, while the modern NDP is more than willing to accept monetary donations from those who commit little time or energy (and in fact many modern parties have created donors' clubs recognizing members based solely on their financial support), in its earlier form the CCF and early NDP had a very different opinion, captured in the words of one supporter who, when asked about these types of donors, replied,

if there's one thing that makes me sick, it's all of these guys who say, 'I'll give you money, but I can't do any work'. We don't need their goddamned money that badly, to hell with it. (Zakuta 1964:18)

Intermediaries Failing – The Growing Gap between Centre and Mass

The key to understanding the dangers of this shift in the relationship, and the reasons why early CCFers were less than enthusiastic about reliance upon these types of supporters, requires a move beyond Habermasian theories of communicative action built upon the intersubjective relationship and to a consideration of Antonio Gramsci's insights into the role of this relationship in the organization of the 'Modern Prince', the political party. Though written before the

professionalization discussed in the previous chapter, Gramsci's political writings while imprisoned by the Italian Fascists provide insights into the way that the relational changes identified above could be expected to impact these professionalized parties.

The modern prince

For Gramsci, the modern political party can be seen as consisting of three distinct parts (1971:152-153). The first of these, the *mass element*, consists of "ordinary, average men, whose participation takes the form of discipline and loyalty, rather than any creative spirit or organisational ability" (152). This aspect of the party is seen as providing the force that supports and enacts what is articulated by Gramsci's second part, the party's leadership. This part is referred to as the *cohesive element*, and is this aspect of the party that "centralises nationally and renders effective and powerful a complex of forces which left to themselves would count for little or nothing. This element is endowed with great cohesive, centralising and disciplinary powers; also ... with the power of innovation" (152). While Gramsci identifies the necessity of both of these parts, he prioritizes the preservation of the second, arguing that it is easier to reassemble the first if dissolved. The third, and final, part which Gramsci identifies at work in the modern political party is the *intermediate element*, by which he identifies that portion of the party "which articulates the first element with the second and maintains contact between them, not only physically but also morally and intellectually" (153). In this way, Gramsci sees the party operating as what he calls a 'collective intellectual'. Through its actions, this collective intellectual articulates the desires of those it represents – by which Gramsci means that it not only vocalizes the surface desires, but also develops and elucidates those desires, through organizational and educational work, through the lens of deeper class or nation-popular awareness.

Seen from this perspective, the party thus consists of a mass of supporters in wider society, a central core of leaders and innovators, and an intervening group that ensures that the other two remain in contact so as to ensure that neither group gets too far ahead, or falls too far behind, the actions and intentions of the other. The importance of this intermediate element for the articulation of needs and the maintenance of the party is highlighted by Gramsci, who argues that parties who lack this element fall victim to an inability to adapt to changing circumstances, as the centre becomes detached from the mass and thus becomes separated from its needs and concerns. He suggests that, when the centre is dominated by a “hidebound and conservative force; ... which stands on its own and feels itself independent of the mass of members, the party ends up by becoming anachronistic and at moments of acute crisis it is voided of its social content and left as though suspended in mid-air” (2000:219). A similar result could be expected if the centre were too far ahead of the masses – what is of concern for Gramsci is not the direction, but rather the separation between the two.

What’s wrong with a vanguard?

There are two crucial arguments that extend from this aspect of Gramsci’s work: the requirement of an ethical relationship with the masses; and the pragmatic need for mass support in order to effect changes at a societal, and not merely a governmental, level. In terms of the former, Gramsci lays out the necessity for an ethical relationship between the party and the masses it depends on, arguing that for the counter-hegemonic party, the fact that the goal of the party is “making the complete realization of one’s own human personality possible for all citizens” (Santucci 2010:61) requires that the party act ethically towards these citizens. In fact, for the counter-hegemonic project of progressive parties to be effective, it requires not only that the masses be ‘in tune with’ the core cohesive element, represented by the party. More than this,

Gramsci argued that it required “not passive and indirect consent, but [consent] that is active and direct, the participation therefore of individuals, even if that provokes an appearance of disaggregation” (Q 15 S 13, cited in Thomas 2009:435). This is counterpoised with the type of passive consent characteristic of bourgeois democracy. Thus the role of the progressive party is seen not merely in serving as the vehicle of competition within the electoral realm, but as the means of education, organization, and articulation of the masses and their desires in the political realm.

The failure to understand this is evident in what Gramsci identifies as the widespread beliefs at the time (a belief which one could argue is even stronger today) of the necessity of lying in politics. Gramsci argued that the belief is far too commonly held

that lying is essential to the art of politics, to be able to shrewdly hide one’s own true opinions and the real purposes to which one tends, to be able to make one believe the opposite of what one really wants, etc. This is so rooted and widespread an opinion that when the truth is actually said, no one believes it. (cited in Santucci 2010:167)

In actuality, Gramsci argued, the reality is quite different. He claimed instead that “in politics one could speak of discretion, not of falsehood ... in mass politics, to tell the truth is precisely a political necessity” (cited in Santucci 2010:168; my emphasis). This point cannot be emphasized enough. Without this ethical relationship, the relationship between the party centre and its mass element becomes such that the only form of consent is passive – direct and active consent requires for its possibility that the relationship be honest. In the absence of this, the party begins to contradict itself, and, with the breakdown of this active consent and the ability to articulate organically the desires of the mass element, encounters greater and greater difficulty in effectively representing the masses.

This need for an ethical relationship, as well as the maintenance of this connection between the mass and cohesive force, is tied to the pragmatic need for mass support in order to effect changes at a societal level. In the absence of the maintenance of this connection, the party falls into the trap that Gramsci identified in the case of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in the 1920s.

Mass participation in the party's activity and internal life, other than on great occasions and following formal orders from the center, was seen as a danger to unity and centralism. The party was not understood as a dialectical process where the spontaneous movement of the revolutionary masses converge with the center's determination for organizing and guiding. It was conceived only as something out of thin air that develops within and for itself and that the masses will grasp when the time is right ... or when the party center decides on an offensive and lowers itself to the level of the masses to incite and lead them to action. (cited in Santucci 2010:92-93)

Gramsci has no time for such a party structure, rejecting those who argue that a vanguard party, acting without the knowing support of the masses, can drag those masses into a socialist future.

Peter Ives points out the regressive nature of this style of party, noting that

[Gramsci] states 'When the party is progressive it functions "democratically" (democratic centralism); when the party is regressive it functions "bureaucratically" (bureaucratic centralism).' The key distinguishing feature between the two lies in the relationship between the leadership and the led – a relationship mediated by organic intellectuals. (2004:57)

These organic intellectuals serve as the intermediate element between mass and centre, and ensure that the leadership/led relationship ends neither as populism, where the centre merely serves to vocalize the masses' immediate wishes, nor as vanguardism, where the masses are merely expected to follow a direction laid out by leaders in the centre. For Gramsci, the modern party must walk a more ambivalent line, representing – like Machiavelli's prince – a combination of both teacher and student, the teacher who "is himself a product of the people he

intends to educate” (Fontana 1993:151). Gramsci’s belief in the necessity of the mediating role played by the intermediate element in maintaining this dual existence is rooted in his understanding of the central role of ‘civil society’ in the “function of hegemony that the dominant group exerts over the whole society”(cited in Santucci 156). By hegemony, Gramsci referred to the entire structure of beliefs and practices, at the level of the common sense of the masses, which worked to maintain the consent of society to a social organization which benefited the dominant class. In such a situation the mere shift in state control, if not preceded by a shift in beliefs in civil society at the level of this common sense, was not seen as sufficient to effect real change. Thomas (2009:423-425) lays out how Gramsci saw this necessity for the popular penetration of such change to the level of the masses in his distinction between the failure of Renaissance philosophies, which remained the purview of an elite core, to take hold in the way that Reformation changes did, which more thoroughly reached the level of the popular masses. In this view the intermediate element is seen as crucial in paving the way for changes at the level of state control by ensuring that, as mentioned earlier, active and direct consent is maintained through the preservation of the moral and intellectual connection between the masses and the central core.

Structural effects

Returning to the breakdown of the relationship identified by a Habermasian consideration of the effects of the ‘cartel’ party’s reliance on unidirectional communication tactics, it is now possible to make some further comments on the effects of these tactics on the structure of the party. First of all, the effect noted earlier in the Habermasian context as the treatment of the other as ‘object’ rather than ‘alter’ is seen to be corrosive to the ethical relationship that is identified above as necessary for the counter-hegemonic project. In the absence of the ability of the party to

act towards citizens as ‘alters’, as recognized possessors of a shared humanity, the needed active and direct consent is lost and the role of the party in preparing the ground in civil society for the development of a new social organization remains unrealized.

In addition to its subversion of the ethical relationship, the unidirectional nature of this type of instrumentalized communication results in an increasing turn to a ‘vanguard’-style image of the party, complete with all of the weaknesses outlined by Gramsci above. While many parties have adapted to the weaknesses in the intermediate element noted earlier by using air war strategies that allow the core element to bypass these intermediaries and speak directly to the masses, the unidirectional nature of communication in this vanguard party furthers the breakdown of the intermediate element, or at the very least its conversion into or replacement by a distorted version of this element concerned only with the broadcast of information or instruction from the cohesive element to the mass element. Though on one level this may appear to serve the necessary function of mobilizing the mass in the way in which the centre desires, it falls victim to the very shortcomings noted by Gramsci in the 1920s in the case of the PCI. In such a case, the intermediate element no longer allows for the organic development of policy in such a way as to ensure that the party’s articulations are in keeping with the desires of the masses they aim to represent – to see the reality of this effect one need look no farther than the dependence of modern ‘cartel’ parties on focus testing and polling to determine the programme they put forward during an election, a programme that Gramsci argues would once have emanated organically from the masses.

This leads not only to difficulty in winning elections, but is also fatal to the implementation of a counter-hegemonic project even in cases of electoral victory. Evidence of the necessity of that mass-centre synergy, and the failure of vanguard-esque beliefs in the

necessity and sufficiency of electoral success of the party's core for political change can be seen in the contrasting examples of public healthcare implementation in the US and Canada. In the US, despite the popular electoral victory of Barack Obama, efforts to implement his healthcare package were frustrated by Congress and the Senate, who quickly became aware of a lack of public support for these measures. Without the support for the idea of healthcare as a public good in civil society, the victory on the political stage of a President who supported it did very little to effect change, as the forces arrayed against it were able to rely on existing views around the proper place of the free market in delivering social goods. On the other hand, the implementation of the CCF's vision of public health care in the province of Saskatchewan in 1962 was successful despite the fact that the newly elected Lloyd government was forced to stand up to the pressures of public protest fomented by the opposition and the medical profession. The overwhelming support of the masses, sustained by the fact that this policy was derived in an organic fashion from an understanding of health care as a public good, an understanding that had been the foundation of earlier smaller-scale attempts by civil society organizations to implement similar practices, helped the CCF government to withstand this pressure. Without this support, Obama's efforts stalled and fell apart.

The effects identified so far suggest that in the case of progressive mass-membership parties, the shift towards the air war may be a short-sighted strategy. The ground tactics served a dual function: not only did they attempt to reach the target voter – they also served as an intermediate element that developed and strengthened the connection between the party's core and the member carrying out the work. The average citizen felt able to take part in the contest being carried out – felt attached to the struggle, and thus to the outcome. It was this constant

reinforcement that enabled the mass-member party to exist, and even if setting aside Habermas' concerns over whether the air war is able to provide for the first function of persuading voters, it seems wholly unable to provide the second, relying as it does on a small group of hired specialists and highly-trained technicians to carry out, and creating a context wherein the necessary ethical relationship is lost as a result of the object-orientation of the central party to its supporters.

A cautionary note from Gramsci ought perhaps to have been considered by these parties. While arguing for the necessity of adaptation by political parties to suit their contexts, he cautioned parties to ensure that changes made to tactics and practices in the name of what he called 'minor politics' – the day-to-day political fight for supremacy on particular issues – did not have negative effects on the course of 'major politics' – the longer term goals and intents of the parties. The effects identified thus far give weight to Gramsci's concern, as they suggest that a mass membership party may begin to weaken itself through too great a focus upon the air war. Unidirectional communication tactics may continue to deliver voters, but at the cost of losing members, until the party risks being left in a position where it is no longer able to mobilize the members necessary for all but the most rudimentary ground campaign, and so is reduced to simple marketing, a transition from citizen to consumer observed in the European context by Habermas (1987). As private citizens are rendered consumers of products by the influence of the economic system, so citizens-as-voters may be rendered voters-as-consumers, to whom parties must be marketed – leaving voters as consumers of democracy rather than participants in it. As noted in the consideration of Gramsci's work above, this breakdown of the relationship between voters and parties is not merely a concern due to mobilization difficulties – it also affects the links between the constituent elements of parties, making it more difficult for parties to articulate

the desires of the masses they represent, thus breaking down the wider counter-hegemonic project and forcing these parties into vanguardism, or crass opportunism.

The Habermasian perspective exposes the dangers of unidirectional communication, as well as providing insight into the shift away from persuasion resulting from the breakdown of the communicative relationship, but his Enlightenment-rooted focus on solely the rational aspects of political communication results in a one-sided analysis of this shift. Gramsci, on the other hand, argued against the view of language as nomenclature or representation alone (Ives 2004:35-36). He believed instead that language had to be seen as metaphor, that it always carried additional meaning as a result of past usages or ideologies carried over from other relations. In addition, Gramsci was highly concerned by the increasingly rationalist view of intellectual thought, believing that this failed to take account of an important aspect of knowledge. In this vein, he argued

the intellectual's error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned (not only for knowledge in itself but also for the object of knowledge) : in other words that the intellectual can be an intellectual (and not a pure pedant) if distinct and separate from the people-nation, that is, without feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and therefore explaining and justifying them in the particular historical situation and connecting them dialectically to the laws of history and to a superior conception of the world, scientifically and coherently elaborated-i.e. knowledge. One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation. In the absence of such a nexus the relations between the intellectual and the people-nation are, or are reduced to, relationships of a purely bureaucratic and formal order; the intellectuals become a caste, or a priesthood. (1971:418)

In order to deal with this aspect of language not fully captured by a consideration of its rational content, and to consider the impact of this excess of meaning, it is necessary to move beyond the work of Habermas and Gramsci. In the next section the work of Chiara Bottici and

George Lakoff, as well as other communication theorists focused on the role of framing and the links between recent discoveries in cognitive science and political communication, will be used to examine the *arational* aspects of political communication and the role of this excess of meaning in how political arguments are received.

Chapter 4

Myth, Frame and Medium

Like Gramsci, political philosophers and communication theorists increasingly suggest that the emphasis on the ‘rationality’ of actors in the political sphere, or even on its desirability, fails to capture the complicated reality of political discussion (c.f. Bottici 2007; Lakoff 2009, 2004; Westen 2007). This creates a challenge, as while the breakdown in the intersubjective relationship identified by Habermas may accurately identify some of the negative effects of the professionalization of political communication for parties, his view of communication linked to political debate continues to prioritize the rationality of those participating in these debates. If these theorists are right in suggesting that this only captures a portion of the political process, then in order to get a clearer picture of what is truly occurring it is necessary to move beyond considering merely the rational aspects of political discussion and instead look at what else is going on when parties reach out to voters.

Over the course of this chapter, the work of a number of theorists working outside of the view of politics as involving rational decision-making will be used to develop a new synthesis by which to consider the effects of the increasingly professionalized nature of political communication. In the first section, a consideration of the work of Chiara Bottici on the role of political myths, and the similar work of George Lakoff in terms of the use of ‘framing’ metaphors in political communication, will extend the field of political communication beyond merely the rational content within it to include what Bottici refers to as the ‘arational’ field of myth. In the next section, by bringing in the work of McLuhan and Innis, what Bottici and Lakoff identify at the level of the *content* of political communication will be seen to be at work in the very *form* of that communication as well. Finally, the second half of this chapter will use these insights to challenge the commonly held belief that changes in the tactics of political parties are non-partisan. By looking at the way in which this ‘bias’ at the level of both content

and form interacts with recent insights in the overlapping fields of neuroscience and political psychology, the particular tactics used by parties will be demonstrated to be anything but non-partisan, and the effects for progressive parties of the ‘bias’ of the arational aspects of the professionalized tactics described in earlier chapters will be considered.

Beyond the Rational – Mythos and Logos

In her book *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, Chiara Bottici (2007) argues for more focus on the role of myth in the political arena, claiming that the people operating within this arena are far from the purely rational actors many theorists have assumed them to be. Bottici asserts that the inclusion of the role of myth in any study of modern politics is essential because, as the reality of politics cannot be captured by rational choice arguments, “a purely rational model of society risks being a model for a world that does not exist” (2007:1).

For Bottici, myth is not (as is commonly believed) necessarily opposed to rationality – rather myth represents the *arational*, that which is outside the realm of rational communication. She arrives at this understanding through a genealogical reconstruction of the term *mythos*, tracing the history of its usage from its Greek roots through modern times. Beginning in ancient Greece, Bottici argues that, far from current views of their opposition, not only were *mythos* and *logos* originally synonymous, but that even as they were distinguished from each other by early philosophers this distinction was based in a view of the two as different in form, yet not necessarily in content (2007:35). Rather than being opposed as true and untrue, which would develop later, they were seen instead as merely different means of expressing or communicating knowledge. Bottici proceeds to argue that the development of the view of myth as opposed to rationality/truth served particular interests – in early stages those of the Judeo-Christian

monotheistic worldview, and later, during the Enlightenment, served the interests of those leading the scientific revolt against the predominance of religion.

The Greek view of *mythos* and *logos* as different expressions of knowledge fits well within what Bottici identifies as the Greeks' pluralistic view of reality. Yet within the monotheistic worldview of the Christian tradition, the identification of *logos* with the Word of God, as Bottici notes (2007:45), created a problem. If only one God could be accepted, and all else was falsehood, this required the relegation of *mythos* to the realm of the untrue. While *mythos* still represented an expression of knowledge, these myths were now untrue representations – set in opposition to the 'Truth' of *logos*. Ironically, as Bottici goes on to point out, this very identification of *logos* with truth and *mythos* with untruth turned on its religious promoters in the wake of the scientific revolution. In distinguishing 'the real' from 'the ideal', she argues (2007:64) that Descartes laid the foundation for this shift, relegating Christian religious beliefs to the realm of the ideal, and thence to the realm of myth to which Christianity had consigned pagan religions. In the wake of the Cartesian division, the Enlightenment was to bring this view to its fullest fruition, arguing for the primacy of *objective* pure reason over *subjective* myth and tradition.

Yet despite the political usefulness of this opposition of reason to myth for Enlightenment thinkers, such a dichotomy is neither entirely accurate nor without its dangers. As Horkheimer and Adorno (2007) lay out in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, such a view elides the fact that the prioritization of pure reason moves full circle and becomes a myth of its own. Yet is this dichotomy necessary? Though her genealogical consideration of myth suggests *why* myth has become identified with untruth and irrationality, Bottici argues that this is not the only way to understand it. At the same time, neither is she endorsing the Romantic call for a new

mythology in place of pure reason, which she sees as a mere reversal of the Enlightenment mistake (Bottici 2007:74). Instead, she argues for an intervention at a prior stage which challenges the construction of the dichotomous relationship of myth and reason and instead allows for myth to be seen as other to reason, but not necessarily opposed.

What then is myth for Bottici? First of all, she argues that it is necessary to start by “leaving the issue of the ‘reality of myth’ in parentheses” (2007:104). Beginning from this perspective, reminiscent of Husserl’s phenomenological approach, Bottici suggests that the question of whether the mythic is true or false is beside the point, as it’s not truth that is being expressed in myth. She argues instead that myth has four defining features (Bottici 2007:106-115) that distinguish it from pure reason (though not preventing overlaps, as she has no interest in re-creating the problematic division she has already discarded). First, myth is figurative – it relies on imagery. Second, myth is not limited in content – myths do not require heroes and gods as their actors in order to qualify as such. Third, while the content may vary, the form is constant and can be best described as narrative in structure. Finally, and for Bottici this is the key feature of myth and that which distinguishes it from mere story-telling, myth provides *significance*. In reflecting on this final feature, Bottici argues that

a myth is not just a story, but a story that works as a *Begrundung* [grounding/substantiation]¹⁴ because it coagulates and reproduces significance {Blumenberg 1985}. While all narratives provide facts with a meaning by simply inserting them in a plot, a myth is a narrative that has also succeeded in – so to speak – ‘making significance’ of them. (2007:123)

¹⁴ There is some difficulty in translating this term directly, which Bottici notes (2007: 123-125). She argues for the necessity of seeing ‘*Begrundung*’ as referencing something that is more than mere ‘grounding’ in the sense of a rational argument, while not necessarily the fullest form of grounding found in religion in the sense of the provision of first and final causes.

It is this final feature which, to Bottici, is the key to the way in which myth works, as it ties back to the need which is fulfilled by the existence of myth. She argues that “human beings not only need meaning in order to orient themselves in the world, but they also need significance in order to live in a world that is less indifferent to them” (2007:82). While rational argument can provide meanings with which the listener can understand the world around them, in a world in which individuals are inundated with stimuli she suggests that it is the unique property of myth that it can provide significance to particular ones. Where science is, according to Bottici (2007:125), concerned with answering the question of ‘how’, myth provides answers to the question of ‘why’.¹⁵ This is no abstract problem – as Antonio Reyes (2011) highlights in his consideration of legitimization strategies used by political actors, this need for significance is critically involved in political communication. Considering arguments made by both Bush and Obama with reference to their differing legitimizations of military actions, Reyes argues that 9/11 is referenced in such a way that “a simple mentioning of [9/11] evokes a set of memories and emotions related to the events” (2011:790). What Reyes refers to here as legitimization through emotions relies on what Bottici refers to as the ability of myth to provide significance to narratives. This is no mere story designed to communicate information, as there is no information contained in the reference to 9/11 that is likely unknown by anyone in the audience. Rather, this narrative provides mobilization and motivation, an *arational* argument as justification for further military responses. It’s important to note here, however, that while Reyes refers to such legitimizing strategies as ‘skewing’ reactions, and implies that their use is

¹⁵ It is important to note here that Bottici differentiates these answers from those provided by religion, arguing that while religion is concerned with ‘ultimate’ why’s, the answers to the questions of life and death, myth is concerned primarily with far more limited and situational why’s. Thus while sacred myths may represent a portion of myths, she argues that not all myths are of necessity sacred ones.

somehow outside the ‘normal’ or ‘rational’ order of things, Bottici would portray this as merely another aspect of the communication.

Inter-relational significance

Before moving beyond Bottici’s work to consider the professionalization of political communication from the perspective of myth, however, there is one final aspect that needs to be understood. Bottici is working, similarly to Habermas, from an inter-subjective (or inter-relational¹⁶) perspective grounded in the work of Blumenberg (1985). From this perspective, she argues that the fourth feature of myth, that of significance, is rendered through the work-on-myth that occurs between narrator and listener – in other words, that whether or not something qualifies as myth is the result of how it is worked on by both speaker and listener, rather than any particular defining structural aspect. Myth is that which is worked on as myth – that which provides significance through such a process. This is crucial to understand as it opens up the plurality of myth and provides clarity as to how a single narrative may serve as a myth for a particular individual in a particular context, while simply being a story in another setting.

Thus for Bottici it is the provision of significance through work-on-myth which is both the defining feature of myth and the need which it fulfils. Starting from this point, that myth is simply other to reason, rather than necessarily in opposition to it, that it answers the need for significance in a similar way to that in which reason answers the need for meanings to orient the world, then a consideration of political communication from the perspective of myth gives access to aspects of this communication not covered by a rational viewing. This, Meili Steele suggests,

¹⁶ Bottici’s reasons for preferring this term stem from a desire to avoid the Enlightenment prioritizing of subjects and to instead focus on the relationship between them rather than any merely internal reasoning – for the purposes of this study that focus overlaps well enough with the Habermasian use of the inter-subjective to stick with a single term for the sake of clarity.

is the true potential of Bottici's argument – it “prepares the way for a conception of imagination that offers a broader canvas of human experience than reason, a canvas that can give myth its place in politics” (2010:1138). If political myths create significance, in the sense of creating a context in which the audience is less indifferent, then further consideration may uncover key aspects of the way in which political actors mobilize support not solely in Habermas' realm of rational argumentation, but also in the realm of political myth.

In this way, the insights into the shifting relationship between the core and mass elements of political parties identified in the last chapter can be seen to be supported by the arational aspects of professionalized political communication. The increased focus on the leader identified as one aspect of professionalization has the effect of separating that leader from the rest of the party, changing the way in which those exposed to these ads begin to see the party. At one time, the image of the social democratic party was that of a mass movement oriented towards a goal, and where leaders, though privileged and respected, were seen as articulators, rather than definers, of that goal. However, as the use of images of the leader in ads, pamphlets, and even the party platform increases, it reinforces the vanguard-style vision of the way in which the party ought to be organized. The prioritization of image in the form of the leader over the substance of the programme supports the simultaneous shift happening where increasingly power is left in the hands of the leader and the professional staff surrounding her, rather than being seen as properly the purview of the membership as a whole.

Framing the Argument

While Bottici uses the concept of political myths to attempt to move past the conflict between Romantic and Enlightenment visions of politics, George Lakoff (2009, 2004, 2002) has become, at least for the greater part of the last decade, something of a cause célèbre in

progressive political activism through identifying the way in which what Bottici terms the mythic is at work in the use of metaphors in ‘framing’ political debate. Lakoff has combined his early work on the role of metaphor in culture (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) with recent insights from cognitive science to highlight some of the same shortcomings Bottici sees in the Enlightenment model of politics, built as it is around the vision of the rational actor engaged in debate. In the opening of his book *The Political Mind*, Lakoff (2009) lays out what he sees as the resulting challenge facing progressive political parties:

Progressives have, without knowing why, given conservatives an enormous advantage in the culture war. ... Progressives have accepted an old view of reason, dating back to the Enlightenment, namely, that reason is conscious, literal, logical, universal, unemotional, disembodied, and serves self-interest. As the cognitive and brain sciences have been showing, this is a false view of reason. Oddly enough, this matters. It may sound like an academic issue, but this assumption about the nature of reason has stood in the way of an effective progressive defense and advancement of democracy. Progressives have ceded the political mind to radical conservatives. (P.1-2)

Lakoff’s work in this book, and in several similar works, begins in much the same vein as Bottici’s, by offering a critique of the rational self-interest view of decision-making that many theorists (and, as he points out, many progressive political operatives) hold to be true. Lakoff argues (2009) that the Enlightenment view that individuals make decisions based on rational self-interest is inherently flawed. While such a model would suggest a conscious weighing of costs and benefits for each decision presented to an individual, Lakoff argues that the majority of information we receive isn’t processed consciously, but rather on a pre-conscious level. Having spent several decades studying the way in which metaphor and analogy is used by individuals to make sense of information they are presented with, he argues that individuals’ *worldviews* have less to do with a conscious decision-making process and are to a greater extent the result of the way in which these metaphors are activated and used. In recent years, Lakoff has extended this

argument to the field of politics, suggesting that the limited knowledge possessed by the average voter leads these individuals to process new information, or fill in gaps, through the use of these metaphors. Unfortunately, as is evident in his discussion of the conscious and pre-conscious processing of stimuli, Lakoff tends to fall into the trap identified by Bottici as that which many working in the Romantic tradition have stumbled into, namely the tendency to reify the division between reason and myth and merely to reverse the prioritization. However, despite this difficulty, it is still possible to find great value in Lakoff's investigation of 'framing', while keeping in mind that the rational and arational need not be seen as mutually exclusive.

Metaphor and frame

Where Bottici identified above the role of political myths in giving meaning and significance to political arguments, suggesting there was an 'arational' element to such communication, Lakoff appears to have arrived at much the same conclusion through his linguistic studies of the role of the brain in processing metaphor, suggesting through the concept of 'framing' that the messages communicated to individuals by political parties function at more than merely the level of rational argument. For Lakoff (2009, 2004), *frames* are the means by which the cognitive unconscious, the part of the brain that processes the vast majority of the information received that is not consciously considered, makes sense of stimuli it is presented with. While the conscious mind may be hearing the words presented in an argument, this cognitive unconscious is always already fitting the ideas and meanings into the frames present in the mind. The way in which these frames are activated, he argues, affects the way in which a listener receives an argument – what Bottici would identify as the significance given to the argument.

So how does frame activation work? For Lakoff, the results of research into cognitive linguistics show that words don't just convey meanings – they stimulate a great deal more. While conveying a rational argument, words are also unconsciously activating frames, metaphors (by which Lakoff refers to systems of frames that work in concert to provide a particular orientation to concepts), and in fact entire neural structures in the brain. As a result, these activations affect the way in which what is heard is understood. An example from Lakoff's work demonstrates how he sees this process affecting the reactions of individuals to political arguments. In *The Political Mind*, Lakoff uses the example of taxation to illustrate the way in which those working from a conservative position use framing to shape the way in which a listener approaches the debate over tax levels. As an example, he identifies the common phrase "tax relief", and proceeds to consider how the brain responds to that stimulus. Lakoff argues that the use of the word 'relief' stimulates an existing frame of rescue-from-affliction, a frame which shapes the way in which a listener perceives taxation. With this frame activated, the mind responds to taxation as an affliction, with the result that those being taxed (the public) are seen as victims, those proposing increased taxation are seen as villains, and those opposing taxation are perceived in the light of 'rescuers' (2009:234-236).

The most worrisome idea for Lakoff, however, is that framing doesn't merely affect the way in which we hear a given argument. In the same way that Bottici argues, following Blumenberg (1985), that myth is always worked upon, Lakoff argues that, much as cognitive science suggests that the act of remembering a particular memory re-writes that memory (2009:231), the activation of a frame or series of frames rewrites those frames and networks in the mind, strengthening certain connections and weakening others, thereby affecting how the mind will react the next time a frame is activated. In other words, if the way in which taxation is

presented to a listener is always, or primarily, in the form of ‘tax relief’, the mind will begin to activate the relief, or rescue-from-affliction, frame whenever taxation is brought up – *even if the word relief isn’t mentioned*. Lakoff builds on this idea to suggest that the key failure of many progressive politicians has been their failure to recognize the impact of framing, and the ‘arational’ power of words. For Lakoff,

the political power of words lies not primarily in their form – that is, in speech – or even in the meanings they are directly linked to, but in the totality of brain circuitry that activation can spread to: the frames, metaphors, prototypes, metonymies, and the entire systems of concepts. Words matter. They shape our politics – and our lives. (P.241)

Lakoff proceeds, in *The Political Mind*, to lay out the ways in which these metaphors shape the differing reactions of individuals with conservative or progressive worldviews to arguments they are presented with, suggesting that a great deal of the difference can be traced to what is for him one of the key metaphors at work in politics, that of seeing the nation as a family (2009:75-82). Arguing that conservatives filter political ideas through what he terms the ‘strict father’ model, with its emphasis on punishment and self-sufficiency, while progressives make use of the ‘nurturing parent’ model and its belief in the role of support and communal strength, Lakoff proceeds to lay out the ways in which these competing paradigms affect the responses of voters to issues as varied as abortion, national defence, and taxation.

Before going any further, it’s important to acknowledge that a number of researchers (Palmquist 2010, Pinker 2006) have called into question Lakoff’s reasoning, in particular the development of the Nurturing Parent/Strict Father paradigm, which is argued by Palmquist (2010) to be designed to support Lakoff’s existing bias. These authors raise important questions about the particular metaphors used by the author to illustrate his work, and provide a worthy caution as to the potential for the worldviews that Lakoff identifies so readily in others to affect

the way in which these metaphors are presented, resulting in a bias dependent on how well the metaphor in question fits with the author's own worldview. Palmquist, however, is quick to assert that his concerns are more with the way in which Lakoff's arguments are presented, than with the argument that there is an embodied quality to reasoning, a quality which goes beyond the level of conscious decision-making, and which Palmquist argues is, in and of itself, a readily defensible position. For the purposes of this paper, these criticisms are largely irrelevant, as while I would agree with Palmquist that Lakoff allows his avowed political partisanship to affect his presentation of these metaphors, the particulars of the metaphors chosen by Lakoff are of less interest for this study than his recognition of the fact that such metaphors play a role in reasoning, an argument which holds with, and fleshes out, the earlier consideration of Bottici, and the example of the effects of the increased use of the leader's image. While some metaphors employed by Lakoff are likely more defensible than others, his work provides a useful example of how researchers working from a perspective based in Bottici's writings might look beyond the rational arguments presented by parties to approach the study of the 'arational' elements of political communication.

Accepting that the mythic aspect represented by the 'frame' plays its own role in the communication of political arguments, and is neither mere window dressing, nor an attempt to somehow underhandedly trick a listener into accepting an argument, suggests that in the same way that the rational portion of a political argument is developed in such a way as to appeal to the needs and desires of the demographic 'target group', the arational portion must be developed in such a way as to fit the experiences, and the pre-existing frames of which the target group are in possession, and which support the rational aspect of the argument. Yet even acknowledging this only recognizes part of the role played by frames. While Bottici expands the field of

experience beyond rationality, and Lakoff points out the use of framing at the level of the *content* of political communication, in order to fully consider the way in which the ‘arational’ is affected by professionalization there is a further step that needs to be taken.

The reader might wonder, to this point, how a discussion of the framing of arguments fits with a consideration of the professionalization of political communication. So what if progressive political operatives need to learn how to frame their arguments – why is that necessarily connected to recent changes in how parties communicate with and organize their members? There is more at work here than an awareness of how symbols, such as the increased use of the leader, affect the member’s view of the party. The connection requires a leap that Innis and McLuhan made sixty years earlier, but which appears to have eluded many of those writing on political communication today. Even Lakoff, though he discusses the importance of framing arguments and emotional appeals, fails to see the logical next step – that the work of Innis and McLuhan suggests that not only should the role of framing be assessed in the *content* of what is communicated, but rather the possibility of the existence of framing effects must also be considered at the level of *form*. If, according to McLuhan, the medium is the message, and if Lakoff’s arguments are believed, that the message cannot afford discordance at its heart and thus that frames and message must resonate with each other, then it must be recognized that this extends beyond the level of content – where frame and message need to mesh – to the level of form, where the method of delivery of this message needs to mesh as well. While Bottici extends the field of political communication beyond the rational, and Lakoff correctly notes that progressives need to learn that frames are far from the neutral contexts for the message that they are often assumed to be, McLuhan would appear to argue that they need to realize that neither are the methods by which those frames and messages are delivered to audiences. The next

section of this chapter will take up this possibility, one which Angus (2000:14-15) highlights as in critical need of study.

Beyond Content – Frames in Form

While Lakoff and Bottici have suggested expanding the study of the content of political communication beyond merely the rational aspect which Habermas focuses on to include the ‘arational’, the work of McLuhan and Innis suggests that such study needs to look beyond the boundaries of content to consider also the mediums through which such content is communicated, as from their perspective such modes of delivery possess framing all their own. McLuhan identifies precisely this blind spot in much communications research, arguing that “failure in perception occurs precisely in giving attention to the program ‘content’ of our media while ignoring the form, whether it be radio or print or the English language itself” (1964:187).

The medium is the message

What does a consideration of the form of political communication suggest? The work of Harold Innis (2007, 1951), suggests that the ways in which societies are structured can be analyzed through a consideration of the key media of communication present in those societies. Innis focused primarily on the distinction between two types of media: first, those which were oriented around *space* – media which were relatively light and mobile, yet vulnerable to deterioration in a short matter of time; and, secondly, those which were oriented towards *time* – media which were durable, yet often heavy and difficult to move over long distances. He used this distinction to develop an argument that the characteristics of societies could be understood through whether they had been constructed through media that prioritized the features of space, or of time.

While Innis opened the door to a historical study of the way that the distinctive natures of different types of communication affected the societies built around them, it was Marshall McLuhan (1964) who took the idea to its finest grain, studying particular forms of communication and the uses made of them with an eye to their impact on both users and audiences of the medium. While writing at the same time and in what others have argued (Grosswiler 1996) is a similar vein to Adorno and Horkheimer's study of the culture industry, McLuhan's work focused not only on broader societal shifts, but also more closely on specific media and their impacts on audiences and participants. In an example of this in his 1964 book, *Understanding Media*, McLuhan highlights the results of a study conducted with undergraduate students a few years earlier (271). In a single verbal flow by one particular speaker, groups of students were presented with the same information through one of the following media – print, lecture, radio, or TV. In testing following this presentation, McLuhan notes that researchers were surprised to find that despite not utilizing any of the distinctive advantages offered by these mediums, students exposed through radio or TV did significantly better than those exposed through print or lecture, and that the TV group far exceeded all of the others. When the study was altered to allow each medium to make use of its particular features, adding auditory or visual clues, page layout design, and blackboard usage by the lecturer, radio and TV remained significantly above print or lecture, yet radio now scored the highest.

McLuhan suggested that two conclusions could be drawn from these findings. First, he argued that these findings suggested that the medium itself had an impact on how an audience engaged with its content – even in situations where the content presented took no advantage of the particular features of that medium. In other words, he argued that the way in which an audience is accustomed to interacting with a medium influences the way in which the content of

that medium is processed. Secondly, he used the significant increase of radio over TV to support his earlier arguments around ‘hot’ and ‘cool’ media – the idea that a particular medium may encourage a more active or passive engagement on the part of an audience. While the particulars of ‘hot’ and ‘cool’ media may be of dubious validity¹⁷, the question of whether particular media are ‘hot’ or ‘cool’ is not of concern for the purposes of this study. The key idea here is merely that the medium of transmission of a message may have an effect of its own on the way in which the message contained within that transmission is processed by the audience.

Emotional appeals

Throughout his work, McLuhan focused on a diversity of media in order to build upon this notion that the intrinsic natures of a particular medium might affect both the way in which an observer reacted to the content, and the shaping of the content itself. A section of his work on the role of emotional appeals in advertising is of particular interest, given the degree to which many of the theorists discussed earlier focused on the importance for the professionalization of political communication of the shift towards an increased reliance on advertising and similar ‘air war’ tactics. Writing on advertising, McLuhan argued that

the ad teams have billions to spend annually on research and testing of reactions, and their products are magnificent accumulations of material about the shared experience and feelings of the entire community. Of course, if ads were to depart from the center of this shared experience, *they would collapse all at once, by losing all hold on our feelings.* (1964:203; my emphasis)

Though McLuhan was discussing commercial ads at the time, many of the same principles hold true for political ones. Ads need to play on emotions in order to resonate – the 30-second or 15-second spot doesn’t have time to convince through rational argument. As

¹⁷ After all, in Stearn’s (1967) edited collection engaging with the issue, McLuhan himself argued that he was more concerned with ‘exploring’ than ‘explaining’, and that his intent was to provoke.

McLuhan suggests, this emotional appeal becomes increasingly important given the structural nature of the advertisement – while the magazine article, or the old-style party newsletter has significantly more space in which to make a rational appeal, television must make do with less time and space. Instead, through the addition of visual and auditory stimuli (music, images, video clips, etc.) it has jacked up the emotional impact. McLuhan was hardly unaware of the impacts this could have for political communication, arguing in a 1971 interview with Maclean's that:

the successor to politics will be propaganda. Propaganda, not in the sense of a message or ideology, but as the impact of the whole technology of the times. So politics will eventually be replaced by imagery. The politician will be only too happy to abdicate in favour of his image, because the image will be so much more powerful than he could ever be. (Newman 1971)

Though there was a great deal of debate over McLuhan's theories in the ensuing decades, two key criticisms need to be considered in order to ascertain whether or not they provide an obstacle to the use of these theories for the purposes of this paper. First, much of the debate around McLuhan's work focused on the degree of technological determinism present in his arguments, suggesting that his conception of the effects of various media on audiences and societies left no room for human agency, leaving members of those societies as no more than products of the manipulation of technological forces beyond their control. While this may be a valid criticism of many of McLuhan's arguments, there are others (Debray 1996) who suggest that the extremity and exaggeration of these arguments can be seen as a tool used to provoke debate and to 'probe' for insight. Debray (1996:71) stresses instead that whether or not many of the arguments of McLuhan went too far, or whether the *particular* intrinsic effects of media are accepted, this does not mean that the point being made in these arguments, that the means used for communication have their own intrinsic effects on the way in which we perceive them, is any less accurate.

The second criticism is of importance not because it suggests that McLuhan's work is not of use for the purposes of this paper, but rather because it exposes the particular way in which his writings may be of most use. Debray notes that Umberto Eco argues that "McLuhan mixes together under the same label of medium the channel or material vehicle of information, the code or internal structure of a language, and the message or content of a concrete act of communication" (cited in Debray 1996:71). This may well be – McLuhan's theories certainly draw on aspects of communication falling within each of those realms – but while the lack of distinction when dealing with issues arising from the various realms may be worrisome for some following the work of McLuhan, I would argue this represents an instructive example of exactly what his arguments offer the current study.

It is this sort of synthesis which I intend to make use of over the remainder of this chapter. On the one hand, the work of Bottici offers a helpful expansion on the rationalist view of communication put forward by those working in the Habermasian tradition. Secondly, the work of Lakoff suggests the importance of the concept of 'framing' to understanding Bottici's 'mythic' aspect of communication. Finally, the work of McLuhan raises the idea that not only the content of political communication needs to be considered in this light, but also the form – the very means by which these messages are communicated to the wider public.

Yet even accepting the arguments of those working in the tradition of McLuhan and Innis, who argue that the form of communication must be considered to have an effect on how the content is received, the key question – *whether the changes in the form of communication linked to professionalization can really be argued to be biased in such a way as to negatively impact the effectiveness of progressive arguments* – remains to be answered. The remainder of this chapter will be focused on exactly that question – what effects have the professionalization

of political communication, particularly in the sense of the growing reliance on the air war campaign, had on progressive parties?

Effects of Framing on Progressive Parties

How might such an analysis – considering not just the rational, but the arational, the framing of both content and form – look at political communication? An example here may serve to illustrate the way this type of analysis might work.

The ad “Courage to Stand”, one of the initial ads run by Governor Tim Pawlenty in his bid (which he has since abandoned) for the Republican presidential nomination, provides a clear example of the strength of the mythic aspects of modern air-war advertising. A full analysis of the 90-second ad would take far more space than is available here, yet even a brief consideration sheds light on the interplay of myth and rational argumentation at work here. The ad begins with a sunrise over Washington, with swelling music reminiscent of a Hollywood movie trailer building in the background. Over this, Pawlenty is heard speaking, opening with a comment on America as “the most successful nation the world has ever known”, as a rapid series of images recall key symbols and moments in American history, from Martin Luther King and the lunar landing to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Statue of Liberty. This success is tied by Pawlenty to the fact that America is also the ‘freest nation’.

At this point, having tied frames referencing ‘freedom’ and ‘success through hard work/The American Dream’ to symbols designed to evoke pride in America’s success, the music swells in a way that movies have trained audiences, as Lakoff would argue, to associate with crisis and the heroic overcoming of obstacles, while simultaneously the images begin to take on a more frantic pace and Pawlenty is seen for the first time. Pawlenty is heard making the argument: “If prosperity were easy, everybody around the world would be prosperous. If freedom were easy, everybody around the world would be free. If security were easy, everybody around the world would be secure. They are not.” Simultaneously, Pawlenty is shown in quick shots of classic leadership contexts – speaking on TV, standing at a podium, and gesturing into the distance. Pawlenty thus connects the ‘freedom’ and ‘success through hard work/The American Dream’ frames to their assumed foundation in strength, making a powerful emotional appeal through the rest of the ad to the image of American triumphalism, and the basis of success in strength (images of success in war), individual effort (a reference to ‘settling the West’), and hard work

(images of blue-collar ‘working men’) – all frames that support the Right’s arguments for the non-involvement of government in people’s lives.

This framing continues in the form of the ad, which was released as a ‘trailer’ for a new book and is replete with imagery and design features that prime the audience as to its proper understanding as an ‘epic’ story, including the use of similar fonts to those used by major studios in their trailers, and the display of names and titles centred on black backgrounds in a way that is characteristic of Hollywood releases.¹⁸

Although of necessity a surface-level consideration of this ad, the above serves to quickly illustrate the pervasiveness of framing in both content and form in political communication. But what does this mean for progressive political parties? Considering the aspects of professionalization discussed in earlier chapters, as shown quite clearly in the shifting focus to the air war over the ground war, I would argue that not only should this professionalization not be viewed as politically neutral in nature, but moreover that a few key effects of this shift can be seen to be particularly troubling for progressives in two ways. First of all, the shifts in form and content characteristic of the air war tend to lend themselves to black vs. white portrayals rather than leaving room for complexity and shades of grey, furthering a tendency towards polarization, with its attendant difficulties for democratic governance. The second troubling aspect for progressives stems from the findings of recent neuroscientific studies that suggest that the differing cognitive-emotional styles of self-identified conservatives and progressives may imply a difference in the degree to which these audiences are primed for the particular characteristics of the media used by air war communication.

¹⁸ Lest anyone think that this type of advertising is somehow particular to the American system, characterized as it is by long primary campaigns and massive advertising budgets, the Conservative Party of Canada’s initial advertising blitz in the 2011 campaign included an ad which was attacked by many for its blatant similarities to the Pawlenty ad (Houpt 2011).

No more shades of grey

With respect to the question of the room for complexity in the air war, Kinsella (2001) references the 1992 Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, arguing that the professors' argument focuses on the fact that:

television is an emotional medium, and emotional messages work best with voters. 'With too much information around,' the professors wrote, 'our senses are overloaded and advertisers have turned away from information-imparting ads to an approach that "goes for the gut", appealing to core values ... Negative ads are crafted in the best dramatic tradition: they contain characterization (implicit or explicit), plot and conflict.'(P.61-62)

This is a similar argument to McLuhan's, referenced earlier. If the air war involves a shift towards a medium that prioritizes emotion, it makes sense to see advertisements that, as these authors suggest, appeal to this aspect. As McLuhan would argue, the content is shaped to fit the means of communicating it in order to maximize its impact.

But what happens to complexity of argument in this situation? When the content needs to be fit into either 30 or 15-second spots, and the goal is to heighten the emotional impact, where is the room for the nuanced argument, or the argument which appeals to a belief in varying shades of grey? Even the other name by which negative ads are often referred to gives a clue about the tendency of this type of advertising: 'contrast' ads. The contrast of black vs. white can be seen throughout professional political communication – just consider 'soft on crime' / 'tough on crime'; 'hawk' / 'dove'; 'family values conservatives' / 'immoral liberals'. Even those classic political ad themes and slogans that aren't direct contrasts avoid ambiguity, calling up language like the Defence of Marriage Act, or the various iterations of the "War On _____".

Yet is the simple loss of the room for complexity in the air war enough to argue that professionalization is necessarily affecting progressives in a negative way? Lakoff and Westen

argue that the problems experienced by progressives are merely the result of a lack of familiarity with the tools – that progressives simply need to embrace the move away from ambiguity and learn to frame their arguments in such a way as to fit with the means by which they are communicating them. If conservatives have already divided the field into black and white, progressives simply need to start arguing for their sides of the debate, or better yet begin to create their own divisions. This is where Lakoff is content to work, and to that end the second half of *The Political Mind* is concerned with walking progressive activists through the process of capitalizing on their own hot-button issues in the way that conservatives do.

There are several problems with this argument – the first of which being that a great many progressive values simply don't translate easily into black and white. Ambiguity is messy, and may lead to communication difficulties, but ideas like multiculturalism, judicial discretion in sentencing, and the legitimacy (or even necessity) of democratic compromise are not easily reduced to either/or arguments without the loss of essential qualities of those arguments. Consider what this does for Habermas's ISS: in a black/white context there is no room for the attempt to reach mutual understanding, and as a result the relationship is forced into the object orientation of strategic action. A second problem is that the argument for progressives to act like mirrored conservatives is a recipe for the kind of polarization that threatens the possibility of the compromise necessary to the legitimacy of the democratic project. If conservatives are encouraged to advocate more and more strongly for X, while progressives advocate increasingly for Y, and if X and Y are constructed as mutually exclusive options at opposing poles of the spectrum, the prospects for democracy are bleak. Removing the possibility of compromise in this way thus risks plunging democracies into either a majoritarian tyranny or the type of deadlock increasingly seen in Washington.

Despite these problems however, there is a key lesson here that Lakoff and Westen theorizing about political communication, as well as Kinsella and others working in the field, have identified correctly – the content needs to match the medium. If the medium of communication is designed around high emotional intensity and a low tolerance for ambiguity, then there are two options – change the content, or change the medium. To do anything else is to merely repeat the mistakes of the past and fail to communicate the message clearly. Because voters are not merely rational decision-makers, the arational aspects of communication matter as well – and when the form and content of communication clash, it can't help but weaken the impact on the audience.

Conservative and progressive brains?

An example of how the differential cognitive-emotional styles of progressives and conservatives may play into their reception of arguments can be found in the results of a recent neuroscientific study. In recent years, neuroscientists have increasingly focused on the issue of political allegiances, documenting differences in brain structure between conservative and progressive partisans. Though a great deal of this research risks leading to a biologically determinist view of political allegiances, the implications of one of these studies for parties attempting to communicate with potential supporters is worthy of consideration here. In a recent study (McLean et al. 2011), the author and his colleagues made use of a “flanker” test¹⁹ to determine the degree to which conservatives or liberals were able to focus their attention on

¹⁹ As McLean and his fellow authors note (McLean et al. 2011), the flanker test works quite simply. Participants are shown a slide of three images and asked to focus only on the central image. They are to push a different button depending on whether the image is threatening, or non-threatening. In some cases all three images are identical, while in others the flanking images are incongruent with the central image. The key measure here is the difference in response times between congruent sets of images, and incongruent ones – an increase in response time is evidence of the need for the brain to actively filter out the incongruent images, thus the greater the difference in response time, the greater the difficulty the participant has in focusing attention on the image in question.

threatening or non-threatening stimuli. The findings of this study are quite startling – when presented with threatening central stimuli, conservatives (but not liberals) have virtually no slowing in response time with incongruent flankers, suggesting that conservatives are so effective at focusing their attention on threatening stimuli that incongruent stimuli hardly register at all.

The implications of this for political advertising appear to suggest that television advertising, particularly negative ads, with their strong emotional cues and recourse to threatening or disgust-inducing stimuli, may be expected to be particularly effective on conservative audiences. If McLean’s findings are accurate, when such audiences are primed adequately by threatening stimuli they may be more readily able to overlook factual inconsistencies or incongruent knowledge, remaining steadfastly focused on the perceived threat. On the other hand, this may suggest that appeals to black and white arguments, as earlier arguments note are necessitated by the medium of television advertising, would be less effective with liberal audiences.

Moving beyond the relational focus of Chapter 3, this chapter started with an acknowledgement of the failure of the Enlightenment vision of individuals as rational decision-makers, as much of the Habermasian perspective assumes. Yet such a move is not a loss, as it implies not a less-than-rational individual, but rather an understanding, as Steele argues, of the far broader canvas of human experience. Through the work of Bottici, this canvas was expanded to include not only the rational aspects of communication, but also the *arational*, the mythic aspects of intersubjective communication. By setting aside the discussion of the truth or untruth

of myth as irrelevant, since myth was not concerned with communicating the truth of things, it became possible to see the role that myth plays in providing the *significance* which is increasingly necessary in a modern world that would without this be rendered too indifferent.

The work of Bottici allowed a consideration of Lakoff's arguments for the use of 'framing' in political communication. In this view, along with the rational content of an argument, the words chosen and the ways in which they are assembled activate pre-existing neural structures and frames which provide an orientation to the concepts presented – similar in many ways to what Bottici refers to as the *significance* of an argument. Crucially, Lakoff argues that the effects do not stop with the orientation to that particular instance of hearing the concept, but rather that the processing of frames affects the neural structure of the mind, creating new linkages and affecting the way in which frames activate when the listener is next exposed to them.

At this point a further connection was made, this time to the work of McLuhan and of Innis before him. While Lakoff had identified Bottici's 'arational' at work in the content of political communication, McLuhan's work suggested that this was not far enough, and that any consideration of the arational aspects of communication needed to extend not only to the content but also to the medium of communication. McLuhan's arguments that the medium of communication can affect the way in which an audience receives that communication both through its shaping of the content it carries and through intrinsic effects of the medium itself expanded Lakoff's notion of the need for frame and message to resonate beyond merely the level of content. Instead, McLuhan's arguments support the need for the message and frame in the content to be congruent with the effects (both on content and its intrinsic effects) of the medium of communication on the audience.

The remainder of this chapter was concerned with what such a synthesis exposed with respect to the professionalization of political communication. A key concern was raised with the arational aspects of ‘air war’ style communication which related to the loss of complexity within this style of communication. Considering air war style communication from the perspective of the arational at both the level of content and form suggested that the mediums of communication used worked best with strong emotional appeals, and that as a result content tended away from complexity and towards black and white understandings of issues. While one possible solution advocated by some involves an adoption of those tactics with a reversal of the polarities on those issues, questions were raised as to the effectiveness or even desirability of this move for many progressive issues. Additionally, the findings of one recent neuroscientific study raised the question of the degree to which the differing cognitive-emotional styles of self-identified conservatives and progressives may prime audiences for the particular characteristics of the media used by air war communication.

This does not, however, suggest that the professionalized version of political communication embodied in the air war cannot be used by progressives, or is somehow only effective for conservatives. Such a statement would be a leap, and would also require us to ignore the successes of progressives who have used this style of communication. What this chapter does suggest, however, is that far from the belief that tactical developments are somehow neutral and unbiased, these changes in form are anything but. As a result, when considering the effects of changes in tactics, researchers and partisans must look at more than simply the impact of changes in rational arguments, but also at the framing changes and the effects of new forms of communication on the way in which listeners respond to the messages contained within them. In the next chapter these insights, and those of the preceding chapters, will be put to work in

analyzing the case of several key turning points in the professionalization of the New Democratic Party of Canada, with an eye towards testing the plausibility of the arguments outlined thus far.

Chapter 5

Case Study: CCF/NDP

In the preceding two chapters, the professionalizing trend that has been identified by the authors discussed in chapter 2, a trend of increasing centralization, leader-focus, and a preference for capital-intensive over labour-intensive tactics, has been analyzed through a theoretical lens built on the work of Habermas, Gramsci, Bottici, and McLuhan. This analysis suggests several implications of the professionalizing shift, implications which can be broadly grouped under the headings of: the relationship between party and voter; the relationship between the constituent parts of the party; the arational/framing aspects of the content of communication; and finally, the extrinsic and intrinsic effects of the means of communication.

In the case of the relationship between party and voter, a consideration of the professionalization of political communication suggests that the increasing reliance on unidirectional ‘broadcast’-style communication tactics, as epitomized by the air war, has two key effects. First, these types of communication tactics lead to an object-orientation of the party towards the voter, with the result that such communications tend to be attempts to achieve a desired effect, the vote, rather than attempts to reach mutual agreement on the desirability of a particular vision. Secondly, the unidirectional nature of these tactics supports simplification of the message and an avoidance of controversial or complex topics which might require an elaboration that the one-way communication is unable to provide. As a result of these effects, the relationship between party and voter becomes increasingly an instrumental one, moving from citizens engaged in democracy to individuals as consumers of parties’ messages.

The second area of effect stems from this shift in relation within the party and is rooted in insights made by Gramsci into the internal workings of the political party. In this view, the increasingly instrumental nature of the relationship between the party and the masses it depends on for support undercuts the ethical relationship between these two groups, with the result that

the 'active and direct' consent that Gramsci identifies as necessary to the counter-hegemonic project breaks down into the passive consent prized by bourgeois democracy. This combines with the atrophying of the intermediate element within the professionalized party – with its increased reliance on a small number of highly trained professionals in place of the masses of semi-skilled volunteers, and increased use of unidirectional forms of communication – to undercut the ability of the party to serve as an organic articulation of the masses' desires, forcing the party to revert to a vanguard style of relation to the larger masses.

This vanguard style is further supported, it is argued in the next theoretical area, by the effects of what Bottici refers to as the arational aspects of professionalized communication. The increased focus on the leader as more than merely spokesperson and the privileging of issues of personal support over programme support work to reinforce a view of the party as properly oriented around a privileged core that is leading a loyal mass. Along with this, the concept of framing developed in the work of Lakoff draws attention to the need to be aware of the effects of the ways in which arguments are presented and tied together, and the ways in which the framing used by the professionalized party increasingly works in opposition to the goals expressed by progressive parties.

This awareness is extended in the final area to the need for increased awareness of the way that the means of communication themselves are affecting professionalized political parties. Building on the work of McLuhan, the increased reliance on advertising and various broadcast mediums is seen to support the concerns of Habermas around the decreasing room for complexity in political communication, as well as leading to an increased reliance on clearly contrasting visions. These black and white arguments, characteristic of increasingly polarized politics, appear to fit more clearly the cognitive processes of conservative voters, while fitting

less and less well with the ambiguity at the heart of the politics of consensus and shared meaning-making Habermas identified as key to the liberating potential of communication, and by extension the counter-hegemonic project.

These are highly concerning arguments, for if even partially accurate they suggest the potential that the tactical shifts of progressive parties may be undercutting their own projects. At this point, however, they remain theoretical arguments which are in need of substantiation before they can be of use in suggesting means of adaptation. At the same time, for this theory to be tested would require significant investments of time, money, and personnel – a full study would need to involve a combination of methods in a variety of comparable cases, including empirical measurements of support and engagement across time, qualitative studies measuring both conscious and subconscious reactions to advertising means and content, and detailed examination of parties' organizational structures and processes over an extended period of time.

Such a study is far beyond the means of a Masters' thesis. Moreover, before this type of investment of time, money and personnel can be justified, some belief in both the plausibility of this theory and its ability to provide insight is required. In such a situation, Harry Eckstein (1975, 1992) argues that before undertaking elaborate studies to validate new theories such as the one laid out here, an important first step is to put the argument through what he terms a 'plausibility probe'. As Eckstein argues, such a study entails the search for

something more than a belief in potential validity plain and simple, for hypotheses are unlikely ever to be formulated unless considered potentially valid; it also means something less than actual validity, for which rigorous testing is required. In essence, plausibility probes involve attempts to determine whether potential validity may reasonably be considered great enough to warrant the pains and costs of testing, which are almost always considerable. (Eckstein 1992:147-148)

In this brief study, therefore, the goal is not to definitely prove or disprove the theoretical insights, but rather to ascertain, as economically as possible, and through the use of a particular representative case, whether there is reason to believe that the theory and its potential analytical utility are plausible enough to justify a fuller investigation.

In order to test the plausibility of the theoretical perspective laid out thus far, this chapter will consider a particular case, that of the New Democratic Party of Canada and its predecessor, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. This particular case was chosen for two reasons. First, as the sole social democratic party in Canada²⁰, it is the closest fit for the type of counter-hegemonic party which Gramsci was concerned with. In addition, my familiarity with this particular party and involvement with its current campaigning practices – practices which parties are understandably reluctant to open to outsiders – provides greater access to the communication tactics under study. I recognize that this means trading objectivity for familiarity – in the words of another scholar of the NDP, this study “is not a work of objectivity because it lacks the two pre-requisites – ignorance and omniscience” (Morton 1974:ix). One final benefit of this particular case is the potential to see the effects of changes at a faster pace due to the party’s more recent roots as a movement – the CCF’s formation in 1933 from a coalition of farmers’ groups and western labour parties is significantly more recent than most similar parties in Western Europe.

²⁰ While an argument could be made that several Quebec-based parties (Québec Solidaire, Parti Québécois, and Bloc Québécois) are social democratic, their focus on the nationalist question clouds the degree to which these parties’ goals and bases can be seen to be those of a typical social democratic party, and consequently complicates an attempt to study their actions and structures in a similar way.

The Early CCF

To identify what has changed over the course of the ensuing decades, it is necessary to first understand what the early CCF was like. Fortunately, there are numerous studies of the CCF's history (Lipset 1950, McHenry 1950, Young 1969, Brennan 1984, Morton 1986, Whitehorn 1992) which allow for an understanding of the structure and practices present in its early days. While these studies examine the historical development of the CCF in great detail, the focus here will be on the four areas identified in earlier chapters: the relationship between party and voters, the party's internal structure, arational framing elements in content, and the effects of the means of communication used by the early party.

In terms of the first area, the relationship between the early CCF and its audience was shaped by both the philosophy of the party and the resource limitations it was faced with. As Lipset notes, "it was difficult to raise money for an active campaign in a province as poverty-stricken as Saskatchewan, but the party depended upon active support from local farm leaders who could campaign during the slack seasons" (Lipset 1950:105). This necessity for volunteers to make up for the lack of funds shaped the means by which the party would relate to voters, requiring a door-to-door campaign that was labour intensive but low cost. Such a campaign made use of the skills volunteers had developed in the earlier farm by farm canvass for the Wheat Pool (Lipset 1950:63). It also allowed the party to overcome what was identified as a challenge, namely the newness of the ideas they were putting forward for many voters. This newness led the party to prioritize 'conversion' of voters to their beliefs, and supported an emphasis on small-group discussions and individual door-to-door efforts rather than "superficial contact with the masses of people" (Zakuta 1964:40). As the CCF moved beyond its founding there were recurring struggles over this orientation, with some raising the importance of tapping into the

same advertising practices as the other parties, while others argued for the importance of the education of the masses, rather than the search for votes. In these early years, however, this struggle was generally resolved in favour of education, rather than advertising (Young 1969:178).

At the same time, this notion of the educational role of the socialist movement was reflected in the way in which developments in the party structure were characterized by a focus on the primacy of the intermediary element. This meant that in the early years the majority of available resources were spent on the placement of organizers into various regions, such as organizers carrying out the necessary work of educating, training and mobilizing supporters. As Young notes, the CCF's early leader, J.S. Woodsworth, felt that the money the party had was "better spent keeping young men on the road than on building the apparatus of a central party office" (1969:180). Even as a shift occurred towards more emphasis on organization as an electoral, rather than merely educational, exercise, the emphasis remained on the construction of local organizations that would allow for strong two-way communication between central workers and local activists and supporters. These supporters were viewed as more than merely electoral tools to be mobilized at election time. Instead, as David Lewis argued in 1947,

these groups are organized, not only, nor even mainly, for work at elections. They are organized as living instruments of democracy. Through them CCF members learn collectively about the economics and social problems of our country and of the world; they learn how to work together for a common purpose, how to govern themselves, and how to defend their rights together.
(cited in Young 1969:150-151)

The high number of direct channels of communication between grassroots members and leaders thus allowed for an organic development of policies, as well as strengthening ties with, and support for, the party's leaders (Lipset 1950:204-209). Further evidence of the organic nature of

policy development can be found in the fact that until 1952 all election platforms were developed and voted on by a convention structure which ensured that policies were developed by those who lived their realities. This focus on intermediaries was balanced, Young (1969:156-160) argues, by an emphasis on strong core leaders as well – such leaders serving as a centralizing and guiding force tempered only in part by the development of the party as a federation, rather than an amalgamation. Though the strong ties allowed for two-way communication, Teeple (1972:235) argues that there was a degree of paternalism present in the way in which the party leadership saw its role as one of educating and leading the masses in the proper direction, paternalism which would shape the party's development in the years to come.

In terms of the arational aspects of the early CCF's communication, one characteristic that is immediately evident can be found in the effects of the earlier-noted emphasis on education and refusal to adopt advertising techniques used by the other parties that were seen as lacking in substance. While early elections consisted of little or no advertising whatsoever, even once ads were incorporated into the electioneering process they featured clear differences from those designed by other parties. This rejection of what were seen as dishonest and overly slick advertising techniques is evident in Fig. 1, showing an ad run in the Toronto Evening Telegram for the 1957 election. In this ad, the emphasis is on the communication of program content and discussion of ten key policies on offer. Noticeably absent are the pictures of candidates present in both Liberal and Tory ads at the time. Instead, CCF candidates are merely listed by name at the end of the advertisement. This underlines the way in which the party tended to emphasize the communication of rational content, trusting in the voter's agreement with the party's stand on issues to sway them in favour of the party, rather than attempting to build an emotional

CHECK LIST... FOR DISCRIMINATING VOTERS



HERE'S THE CCF PROGRAM . . .

1. Stop inflation by curbing profiteering
2. Adequate old age and blind pensions
3. Complete national health insurance
4. Low cost and low rent homes.
5. National Labor Code
6. Parity for farmers
7. Federal aid for education
8. Control of monopolies and combines
9. Taxation of excessive profits
10. Planned economic development

✓ **YOUR** vote counts just as much as a millionaire's. Be sure to use it.

Your vote IS important. Nobody would get elected if nobody voted. It's only when you and others VOTE for what you want that you get what you want.

✓ **YOU** lose your vote only if you cast it for a party you don't REALLY want.

When a party hasn't got a PROGRAM, it usually tries to win support by saying we all must get together to beat somebody else. But, remember, your vote is your chance to register your opinion. You throw it away if you don't register your REAL opinion.

✓ **CANADA** is a better place because of the CCF fight for justice over the years.

Old age pensions . . . unemployment insurance . . . family allowance . . . a first hesitant start on health insurance. Everybody knows these came about because of constant CCF pressure. Get more CCF MP's at Ottawa to fight for you.

✓ **The CCF** is the ONLY party with a program of progress and fair sharing.

This is the kind of program most people WANT. Show that you want it by voting for your CCF candidate.

THIS IS WORTH VOTING FOR!

Published by CCF Office, Ottawa

Share Canada's Wealth... VOTE CCF

VOTE FOR THESE CCF CANDIDATES IN THE TORONTO AREA

BROADVIEW—Ron Burns	PARKDALE—Archie Chisholm	YORK EAST—Sid Dunkley
DANFORTH—R. Alfred Best	ROSDALE—Tom McAulay	YORK NUMBER—Margaret Thetford
DAVENPORT—F. Andrew Brewin	ST. PAUL'S—Margot Thompson	YORK-SCARBOROUGH—Eiva Sigon
EGLINTON—Gwenyth Grube	SPADINA—Jack Kodzlerzykowski	YORK SOUTH—William Sefton
GREENWOOD—Maurice G. Panshon	TRINITY—Dr. Frank Anceovich	YORK WEST—Rose Sark
HIGH PARK—G. W. Pethick	YORK CENTRE—Roy Begley	PEEL—John Whitehouse

Figure 1

connection between the voter and the individual representative running for the party in that region.

The framing of early arguments, however, did extend beyond merely the rational argument. As Young (1969) notes, it also drew upon the party's roots in Depression-era farming communities through its emphasis on attacks on big shots and capitalism, attacks that ran into decreased success in urban areas and as the country moved into more prosperous times. References to the sharing of wealth, and attacks on profiteering, contain within them frames that are at work in many Marxist-rooted parties, frames that attack the core principle of private wealth generation and emphasize the importance of the redistribution of property within the population. The framing of early campaigns can also be seen to contain an undercurrent of frames at work in the province of Saskatchewan, with its emphasis on community (a necessary component of the low-tech grain farming present in the West) and appeals to the social gospel present in the Baptist, Lutheran and United churches. These frames found success in Saskatchewan, supporting the party's first electoral success in 1944, but were less effective in other areas. The 'newness' of many of the frames used by the early CCF, however, was mitigated in part by the emphasis on education and the intensive small-group organizing and communication strategies noted above. These settings allowed the party to do the work of establishing new frames which could be activated by later pamphlets and electoral work.

Finally, in terms of the effects of the means by which communication between the party and voter occurred, the early CCF clearly focused much more attention than other parties on person-to-person communication, either through small groups or the door-to-door canvass. As noted above, this had its roots in the greater availability of labour than capital, though it was also supported by conscious decisions to emphasize education over advertising, and recognition of

the difficulty of communicating ideas foreign to many voters in simple slogans. This avoidance of mediums reliant on simple slogans preserved the room for complexity and allowed in some ways for the avoidance of black/white polarizations of principles, though concurrent attacks by other parties using themes of freedom vs. socialism tended to polarize views of the party in the public mind (Young 1969:200-205). One key decision to note is that as the party developed the assets to move beyond its reliance solely on door-to-door canvasses, the decision was made to put money into launching a weekly newspaper, rather than relying on buying ad space in hostile papers (Lipset 1950:118). Referring back to the consideration of the phases of mediatization in Chapter 2, it's immediately evident that this had the effect of shifting the balance between media and political logics. While most other newspapers were run by allies of the other parties, these allies were still concerned with questions of circulation and advertising revenue, and thus subject to the influence of media logics in their coverage of parties. On the other hand, a party newspaper – though weakened in terms of the public's sense of its objectivity – was able to function almost solely in terms of political logics, allowing party staff the space to write in the length required to deal with complex and ambiguous issues, and avoiding the necessity to alter arguments as much to fit media logics.

Turning Point – The New Party and Waffle Reaction (1961-1972)

While the CCF gained support over the course of the wartime years, this support only translated into electoral success in the province of Saskatchewan, where the party was to spend the bulk of the remainder of the century in government. Outside Saskatchewan, however, support for the party had slipped back to average between 10 and 13% by the 1950s, and even those within the party were beginning to question its ability to achieve electoral victory. These circumstances, combined with the recognized links between successful social democratic parties

and organized labour in other parts of the world, led to the decision to form a new alliance under the rubric of a “New Party”, built upon the twin pillars of the CCF and the Canadian labour movement (Morton 1974:18). The outcome of this process was the founding of the New Democratic Party in 1961. The next eleven years would prove to be a time of conflict, as increased financial resources provided the opportunity to move the party in the direction of greater professionalization, a direction which some within the party would oppose. The latter group, calling itself the Waffle²¹, challenged the party’s establishment to shift the party back towards its roots as a movement, and at its height commanded the support of nearly 40% of delegates at the 1969 biannual convention. By 1972, however, the Waffle would be banned by the party, with its supporters either reincorporating into the broader party or renouncing the party altogether, and the changes set in motion in this period would set the course the party would follow for the next few decades. This section will focus on both the changes implemented by the establishment, and on opposition reactions and proposals, as in some cases, these shifts in party tactics are remarked upon in the historical record, while some trends, not immediately visible in these records, can be seen more clearly by the reaction they created from those opposed to them.

To examine whether there is evidence to support the effects of the professionalizing trend proposed by the earlier theoretical analysis, changes in the party will be considered here in terms of the same four areas identified at the beginning of the chapter. In terms of the relationship between the party and the voting public, several shifts over this time period are immediately apparent. While the lack of financial resources in the early CCF had restricted the party to the labour-intensive but low-capital style of door-to-door contact, the incorporation of organized

²¹ The name “Waffle” had its roots in a statement made by Ed Broadbent, one of the key authors of the initial Waffle manifesto, in reference to the argument that, should the party waffle, it ought to “waffle to the left” (Morton 1986: 92).

labour within the NDP allowed the party to significantly increase its campaign expenditures. These grew rapidly – as Morton (1986:35) notes, the central budget in 1962 was \$116,000 (six times greater than in the last CCF campaign) and by 1965 this had doubled again, with the party spending \$200,000 of the now \$1,000,000 election budget on its central campaign. The addition of this money encouraged a greater use of ‘air war’ tactics to reach voters, allowing the party to develop a true advertising campaign, and in 1965 enabling the party for the first time to contract an advertising firm to design it. At the same time, the success of ‘the System’, a method in which the party mobilized supporters from surrounding regions to focus on a target seat and enable a full three-canvass door-to-door campaign in an urban setting, in several by-elections in 1963 and 1964 (Morton 1986:54) showed that the professionalizing trend within the party could also be put to work on the ‘ground war’ practices it utilized. The labour resources required for this type of work were stretched thinly outside of by-elections, however, as it required the party to draw resources from surrounding regions. Adding to this drain was the fact that the new style of increased central campaigning required greater attention from a media establishment that was less than friendly, and which tended to restrict coverage to the two major parties by the final week of the campaign. The use of large rallies in a number of major cities over the course of the final week, an adaptive tactic that increased media coverage, also shifted labour resources into ensuring attendance at rallies to provide positive media attention rather than canvassing that would reach out to persuade unaffiliated voters.

The effects of these shifts are clear. While increased financial resources enabled the party to reach a greater number of voters than before, these voters were reached in an increasingly strategic, rather than communicative manner. Even the use of election surveys in 1965 in four cities to develop the party platform and messaging did not represent what Habermas would see

as a true two-way communication, as in such a situation the orientation of both party and voter remained an instrumental one. Although this type of instrument allowed the party to ‘measure’ the support of voters for particular policies, and thus design its platform in such a way as to be able to repeat the inferred desires of the public back to them, it did not allow for the development of needs or desires through the ‘working through’ process present in the types of deeper discussions characteristic of the earlier CCF’s small-group educational work. In this can be seen the classic Marxist difference between the class-in-itself and class-for-itself²² – the survey respondent and the party are not in a relationship that allows for true articulation.

At the same time, the increased focus on election spending (as union money could be mobilized for elections in a way it couldn’t for general operating expenses), led to a decrease in spending on inter-election education and organizing work, first in the name of greater pragmatism, and then as a result of increased debt levels at the end of election periods. The frequency of elections during this decade, with federal elections in 1962, 1963, 1965 and 1968, increased this financial pressure. By the end of the 1968 election the party found itself deeply in debt, forcing it to shut down the party newspaper and transfer the research department to the caucus office (Morton 1986:85). Though this removed an immediate financial drain on the party, it had the dual effect of both eliminating the major means by which party members could influence policy development, and also shifting the focus of research from policy development to the day-to-day battles of the party’s elected members in Parliament.

²² As Borland (2008) notes, in his writing on the issue of class consciousness, Marx “distinguished between ‘class in itself,’ where workers merely have a common relation to the means of production, and ‘class for itself,’ where they organize to pursue common interests” (134).

These communication shifts supported, and in turn were supported by, concurrent changes in the party's structural organization, shifts which had been underway since the later years of the CCF. While J.S. Woodsworth's vision for the party had emphasized regional and local organizing, Young (1969:161) points out that David Lewis and M.J. Coldwell had been involved since the late 1930s in overseeing an increasing centralization of the party. Though the process was already underway during the later years of the CCF, it was accelerated with the founding of the NDP as the introduction of union money allowed the central office financial independence and access to a pool of money denied local campaigns. The question of centralization, however, is a complex one in the case of the NDP. While those at the core were involved in attempting to increase central control over many aspects of the party, they were simultaneously trying to promote the party as a true alternative in the province of Quebec, a province which was increasingly caught up in nationalist debates. In addition, the nature of the party as a single entity engaged in both federal and provincial (and for a short time in Toronto, municipal) politics meant that provincial sections guarded their own control as strictly as provinces did the constitutional separation of powers. As a result, the centralization of the party was not a simple matter of a single core element increasing its control, but rather occurred on several levels, with core elements in each province increasing their control, and with central control at the federal level experiencing numerous shifts to accommodate the desires of the Quebec section for policy flexibility.

At this point in the party's history, there is a clear shift evident in the type of participation and consent of the party's masses. The type of 'active and direct' consent that was noted in the earlier Gramscian analysis saw a resurgence in the process of founding the NDP, as nearly 300 'New Party' clubs were formed across the country and took an active role in debating policy

directions and electing delegates to the founding convention. However, as soon as the founding process was completed, the clubs were seen as a threat to the policy-making control of the party's centre and were therefore dissolved (Morton 1986:28). The party can be seen here attempting to shift membership support from the 'active and direct' consent which Gramsci argued was necessary for the articulating role of the party to the style of 'passive' consent characteristic of liberal democracy, a move which shows that many of those operating at the centre were already seeing the party's existence as a part of that form of democratic system.

This shift was echoed in the decreasing focus on the intermediate element over the course of the decade. While the early 1960s featured an emphasis on membership building, engagement, and an increased role for organizers and other intermediates, reaching a peak in the success of 'the system' and the subsequent endorsement of a focus on membership and inter-election organizing by the Ontario section of the party, by the end of the decade the federal organizing department was shut down and the research department had been moved from an active policy development role within the party to a focus on day-to-day parliamentary battles in the caucus (Morton 1986:79,85). Those involved in the Waffle focused much of their attention on these shifts and the necessity of rebuilding this intermediate element through a growth in inter-election education work and an investment in building ties with allies in the community, and in particular through the redevelopment of more inclusive policy development mechanisms, arguing that:

We must be prepared to involve the people whom we say we are working for in the process of formulating our Party's policies ... For example our policy on poverty should be worked out with the poor themselves (as was this statement) not on behalf of them... The N.D.P. must operate on the principle (either out of or in power) that those who experience a problem first hand must have a major role in finding the solution. (Waffle 1971)

However, with the defeat of the Waffle not only were these ideas set aside, but – as Morton argues – the party developed a heightened sensitivity to “the dangers of policy discussion” (1986:155).

The combination of the decline in intermediate elements and the shift to a more passive form of consent led as expected to an increased emphasis on the party as a counter-intuitive merger of the worst aspects of vanguardism and populism. While Gramsci’s modern prince represented a merger of the best of both, the leader who is also one of the led, and thus has an organic connection with those she leads, in this vanguard-populist party the masses of the party have ceded control to a centralized core, but a core which acts based not on an attempt to move society forward in a revolutionary sense, but rather to represent the status quo as it currently exists. This shift is evident in arguments used by those on the establishment side of the debate over the party’s direction at the 1969 convention. The establishment repeatedly clashed with the Waffle movement over questions of how far ahead of the public the party ought rightfully to be. One such exchange, characteristic of the tenor of debate, came from Ed Schreyer, the newly elected NDP Premier of Manitoba, who argued that

while we have a responsibility as politicians to provide the public with leadership on social concerns, we’re being ineffective politicians if we are so far out in front the public can’t even see us. (cited in Morton 1986:99)

This view of the party’s proper position as providing leadership, but remaining close to the current beliefs of the masses of voters, is significantly different than the view held by the early CCF who saw their role as one of education and conversion to a new way of thinking, and emphasized the necessity of designing the methods by which they reached out to the public around this fact. Instead, having accepted the vanguard-populist style relationship with the public characteristic of the modern mass party, the NDP by the end of the 1960s was beginning to see

its own structure in that way. On the other hand, Waffle statements at this convention, and at the final struggle between the sides at the 1971 Ontario convention, were characterized by a different view of the way in which the party should be organized. Within the document they provided to convention attendees, *For a Socialist Ontario in an Independent Socialist Canada*, Waffle organizers argued for a role more closely resembling Gramsci's articulation, claiming that

we cannot wait for the victory of a future socialist government; we must begin to work with and help build people's organizations whose aim is to create a new social consciousness. That consciousness is the necessary prerequisite for the fight to eliminate the inequality of wealth and power which exists in our society. (1971)

Though the convention debate between these two groups was characterized as a question of a leftward shift vs. a pragmatic moderation, what is clear is that – policy differences aside – the two groups were operating from different conceptions of the relations between the party core and the masses it represented. The difference between the two is primarily evident in the focus of the arguments – while both make valid points, the former focuses on populist aims while the second is concerned with how to move the population towards the party's goals.

Arational changes in this period are less clear, in part because of an emphasis on rationalist understandings of political tactics in the historical record. However, even given the limitations of the available evidence some initial insights can be made. First, while early CCF arguments featured frames that were quite new for the majority of the public, and the tactics were as a result structured around the need for more education and development of these frames between elections to allow for their usefulness in election periods, the shift in emphasis by the NDP over this period to electioneering and away from education required a shift in frames to those more prevalent in the population. Early campaigns in the 1960s featured many of the same frames as the CCF had been accustomed to using, with Tommy Douglas' famous 'Mouseland'

speech key among them. This fable references a fictional land where the inhabitants (mice) take turns voting first for black cats, and then for white ones, each time suffering further, until finally one mouse has the revolutionary idea of electing mice as the government (and is promptly locked up as a Bolshevik). This story contains within it frames which reference the idea that the classes within society are inherently opposed, and that those in power are in a predatory relationship with the masses of the population. While this story worked amongst the converted, and in the hands of a master orator such as Douglas, it required an understanding of the socialist frames at work within it for real significance to be achieved. Thus, as the party focused increasingly on achieving electoral victory through mass support, the frames at use shifted away from issues of class and towards frames that were more prevalent in the Canadian public at the time.

In the late 1960s this meant two key framing shifts. First of all, increasing prosperity²³ and a lack of inter-election educational work meant that references to class conflict found little uptake in the general public. Instead, the 1968 election slogan “You win when you vote NDP” reflected an increasingly individualist focus and a narrative that placed emphasis on material gains for the individual voter, as opposed to earlier CCF arguments around wealth sharing. This shift went so far as to include small businesses (which socialist ideologues would have classified as petty bourgeois) in the category of those whose interests the NDP would work to further. In the second key shift, the party moved away from socialist frames of the world as a brotherhood of men, and towards frames that emphasized economic nationalism, and to an extent anti-Americanism, issues that were of growing importance in the wider public. These frames were

²³ Though the post-war boom and consolidation of capitalism represented by Fordism, as well as the realities of the cold war, represent external forces that played a role in weakening mass support for a left alternative, the particular ways in which these forces affected left wing movements throughout the West are beyond the scope of this paper. For the purposes of this study, the focus will remain on the effects of this shift, rather than the degree to which various factors played into it.

repeated, and expanded, by the Waffle movement during the conflict between the two groups, as even the title of their document “For an Independent Socialist Canada” placed the liberation of Canada from foreign influence in front of, and as a necessary precursor to, any economic liberation. While this anti-Americanism was linked to the support of international trade unions for the establishment’s actions against the Waffle, the issue remained central to establishment advertising over the next several campaigns – reaching its peak with the anti-American focus of the 1988 election attacks on the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (Whitehorn 1992: 221).

As well as shifting frames in terms of how the party’s programme was presented, a concurrent shift was underway in the advertising away from arguments that relied on the voter to be a rational decision-maker and instead making early movements towards arguments which resembled the more personalized and emotional appeals of the Liberals and Tories. Increasingly the party relied on the symbolic figure of the leader, whether Douglas, Lewis, or in the following decade, Broadbent. Where before the leader, though always respected, was seen as the carrier of the message, increasingly the leader became the message itself. This had its strengths – after all, nearly two decades after his death Tommy Douglas was still voted the Greatest Canadian in an online poll run by the CBC – but also had the effect of supporting the structural shifts which emphasized the central element occurring elsewhere in the party.

Finally, shifts in the media used for communicating with voters had effects of their own over the course of the 1960s. While there were exceptions (the success of, and reliance on, ‘the system’ of repeated door-to-door canvasses in the early decade, for example) the increasing ability of the party to utilize the broadcast means of communication characteristic of the air war had the expected effect of increasing the party’s reliance on slogans. As discussed earlier, the distinctive natures of radio and television advertising create a preference for clear,

uncomplicated, and emotionally-based appeals to voters. Simple lists of policies, like the one laid out in the CCF ad above were ineffective in such contexts and thus made way for appeals such as the vastly simplified “Corporate Welfare Bums” slogan used in the 1972 election. This slogan is both simple to understand and emotionally appealing, as it juxtaposes two images often seen as opposed but both emotionally laden. Through linkage, the connection of the corporate CEO, already seen as well-off, and the ‘welfare bum’, a morally-deficient individual within the Protestant ethos of hard work and financial frugality, reinforces an image of a lazy corporation, just waiting for a handout – set up in opposition to the hard-working Canadian family man.²⁴

Though the shift in messaging from complex ideas and arguments to more easily communicated slogans was facilitated by the hiring of an advertising agency in 1965 and in each subsequent election, the need for such a change in slogans was also accelerated by the loss of the party’s newspaper due to financial constraints in 1968. This loss meant that the party was exposed even more clearly to the market logics that drive the major newspapers, as its reliance on these papers to deliver its messages and slogans to the public increased. As a result, the party increasingly had to take the market logic notion of ‘what will sell’ into account when crafting slogans and statements. Such logics were also at work in the development of the practice of holding large leader’s tour rallies in the campaign’s final week, as it was determined that such events – drawing at their peak in excess of 15,000 people – were one of the only ways to ensure the media would cover the NDP in the late stages of the campaign. Rallies, however, have

²⁴ Unfortunately for Lewis, the danger in utilizing frames which fit well into other political philosophies, such as that of the ‘lazy welfare bum’, was demonstrated in this case by the use of the same slogan, with the first word dropped, to great effect by the Conservative leader in the later stages of that same campaign (Morton 1986: 142). As Lakoff would point out, frames that are activated become increasingly easy to activate in the future, and not always in the way originally intended. This particular case, he would argue, is further evidence of the need for the Left to develop its own frames in the public, as the early CCF did.

constraints of their own. As any teacher who has taught concepts to both large lectures and small tutorials would agree, there is a significant difference in the degree to which the audience is able to take up ideas, especially those which are controversial or new. Moreover, the need to keep attention and energy, in a setting where television cameras are waiting for any sign of a slippage in support, required the speaker to stick to topics and ideas which the audience was already primed for, supporting the move noted earlier towards easily understood slogans and commonly-held ideas and away from complex ideas or any attempts at education around new concepts.

Turning Point – The NPI and Jack Layton

In the end, as Morton (1986:135-137) notes, the changes opposed by the Waffle were in many ways merely accelerated by the conflict between the establishment and its left-wing critics. The refusal of compromise efforts stiffened the resolve of those in the centre, and the eventual resolution of the conflict through the departure of the Waffle left the party without many of those who had advocated a shift in tactics and with the core element of the party even more convinced of the need for centralization of control and the danger of opening up policy debate to the wider membership. As a result, the shifts identified as having begun in the 1960s would continue and escalate in the decades following. By the 1990s, however, the decline in NDP fortunes from a height of 20.4% and 43 seats in 1988 to a low of 6.9% and 9 seats in 1993, barely recovering to 11% and 21 seats in 1997 (at a time when the strength of anti-globalization movements and left-wing social groups operating outside of the NDP was growing) would re-awaken those within the party and sympathetic organizations who felt that a shift was needed (c.f. Berlin and Aster 2001). In the New Politics Initiative (NPI), and the subsequent election of Jack Layton – seen by many to be sympathetic to the direction proposed by the NPI – as NDP leader in 2003, the question of the proper direction the party should head would be reexamined.

The relationship between party and voter, already characterized by a degree of reliance on unidirectional ‘air war’ communication tactics by 1970, had by 2000 become overwhelmingly weighted in favour of these broadcast tactics. While it was noted earlier that the party in the 1960s was beginning to develop increased financial resources as a result of labour ties, these resources (which grew as a result of election financing changes in the Election Expenses Act of 1974, which entitled parties to a rebate on a portion of election expenses) became increasingly necessary over the ensuing decades as the volunteer labour resources the party had once depended on faded. Further shifts in this direction occurred in 2003, as amendments to the Canada Elections Act introduced public subsidies in an attempt to ensure relatively equitable spending ability amongst political parties (an action that is in keeping with the tendency of Negrine’s (2008) ‘cartel’ style parties to institutionalize even party funding within the political system, as discussed in Chapter 2). These subsidies drastically increased the funding available to the central party for use during elections, leading to a rapid growth in central party expenditures.

An idea of the impact of this added revenue can be found in a consideration of NDP spending practices over the course of the five elections between 2000 and 2011. While central spending (roughly correlating to the ‘air war’ portion of expenditures, including advertising, polling, staffing, and the leader’s tour) was \$6.3M in 2000, an increase of \$300,000 over the 1997 election, spending was to increase rapidly in the elections following, with the party spending \$12M in the 2004 election, \$13.5M in 2006, \$16.8M in 2008, and \$20.4M in the 2011 election (Funke 2012). At the same time, spending at the individual campaign level, the bulk of this money representing ground war expenditures²⁵, increased by only a small margin, from

²⁵ Note that the division between ground war and air war is imperfect here. In actuality, local campaigns will spend a portion of their expenses on advertisements and mailed brochures, while some central staff provide training and support for local campaigns, an area more commonly grouped within the ground war. For the purposes of this

\$5.2M in the 1997 election to \$6.7M in 2008, the last year for which numbers are available (Funke 2012). What is immediately evident over this decade, therefore, is that while central and local spending was roughly comparable in 1997, by 2011 central spending represented nearly two and a half times what was spent at the local level. This had several important effects. First of all, the increased use of advertising and broadcast techniques noted first in the 1960s had become by the end of this decade the predominant means of communication between the party and voters. As a result, this reliance on unidirectional techniques meant that the party relied increasingly on focus groups and daily tracking polls to determine public response to policy ideas and platform support. In addition, the drain this additional central expenditure created on the party's financial resources necessitated an increased focus on elections on the part of the party and its fundraisers, with the consequence that inter-election outreach and communication with voters was increasingly left in the hands of the federally-funded caucus office researchers and communicators.

The dangers which Morton identified in the loss of the party's research department to caucus control apply here as well – the focus of caucus staff on the day-to-day battles of the caucus in Parliament means that most communication between this group and the wider public remains focused on these matters, rather than larger questions of party policy or issue development, while the limited time frame of the party's communications during the 5-6 weeks of an election campaign means that education on complex issues is of necessity abandoned in favour of the communication of ideas already supported by the target audience. The effects of

paper, however, the distinction suffices for accuracy. If anything, it underestimates the extent of reliance on the air war, as local campaigns are far more likely to spend money on expenses that fall within the air war than central teams are to attempt to exert influence on the ground.

this focus were also noted by Jim Stanford (2011), one of the architects of the NPI, who argued against this trend, suggesting instead that

social change does not come solely, or even primarily, from electoral campaigns. It comes, rather, from deeper shifts in popular consciousness, ideology, and organization. ... The success of progressive political parties ultimately depends on whether we are winning that day-to-day battle of ideas in society, and on our success in building alternative structures and capacities among the whole spectrum of communities fighting for social change.

In this way, the NPI was arguing for the same recognition of the importance of the longer-term inter-election educational work that the Waffle had, and that early CCF practices had been characterized by. Like the Waffle before them, the NPI's arguments (though supported by many convention delegates) were soon forgotten in the focus on electioneering, and over the ensuing decade this shift towards a singular focus on elections would only intensify.

As the earlier assessment of the NDP in the 1960s noted, these shifts in the relationship between the party and its voters were reflected in concurrent changes in the structure of the party and its relationship with its members. The election focus noted above created an ever-increasing demand on the party to raise the funds to support growing communications budgets, while the reality of minority Parliaments, with five elections in eleven years, left little time for the party to focus on anything else. As a result, the loss of intermediaries increased as the relations between the central element of the party and the mass element grew progressively more unidirectional in nature. Where once J.S. Woodsworth's organizers had traveled the country, building organizations in every region they passed through, and raising what money they could in their travels, the shift in focus from the development of labour resources to financial resources led to the replacement of the majority of these organizers with fundraisers, whose relationship with members was purely instrumental. Fundraisers would disseminate a pre-scripted message to

members, and collect financial contributions in return, with messaging designed to inform members of the latest talking points and inspire the greatest donation. What organizers were left were increasingly hired in the final few months prior to elections, and as a result were focused primarily on election preparation, rather than movement building. Reflecting on this reality, Murray Dobbin argues that the growth of what he terms ‘machine politics’ over the past decade has weakened remaining links between the party and its members. He argues that, in recent years, the party

had become a party machine, and with the exception of a small percentage of members, most who joined were restricted to writing cheques to the party and working in elections for a few weeks every four years. The party's culture became over the past few decades profoundly apolitical. (2011; emphasis added)

The shift identified in the 1960s from the active, direct consent proposed by Gramsci as a necessary element of a counter-hegemonic movement to the passive consent typical of liberal democratic politics can thus be seen to have continued over the ensuing decades.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the paradoxical conception of the party as both vanguard in the view of its members, while populist in its political operations, has also grown over the same period. As the intermediate element is allowed to wither, and relations between the core and mass elements become increasingly instrumental in their orientation, the core element is reduced to seeing its role as one of determining, as Schreyer referenced in 1969, precisely how far ahead of the public the party can be. The degree to which this vanguard-populist style had become the norm is evident in the content of NPI critiques of this feature, including a call within their 2001 vision statement for a redevelopment of the intermediate elements within the party, arguing that, with training and support from the central party for riding associations, “party members can then act as a badly needed bridge between those mobilizing for change in broader society and those

working for changes from within the political system” (Cofounders of the New Politics Initiative 2011). Despite the hope from some within the NPI that, as a result of his activist roots, Jack Layton would be able to shift the party back in this direction, the vanguard-populist mentality had to an extent permeated even the NPI to the extent that, having elected their chosen leader, Libby Davies (2011) argues the NPI “folded up our tent and said, we're too busy – we did what we wanted to do.”

The extent to which this mentality permeated the party is also evident upon consideration of the framing of the party’s communication with the wider public. As noted in the earlier discussion of Lakoff’s work, successful framing during election campaigns requires the presence, in the public’s mind, of the frames in question. The shift of the party towards this electoral focus is thus clearly visible in the way in which the messages conveyed, and the frames used to convey them, as Stanford (2011) notes, show evidence of the party’s efforts to stay within the realm of the status quo by focusing “on fine-tuning a message (backed up by effective electoral machinery) in order to appeal to a larger slice of the existing spectrum of political opinion.” Such fine-tuning was on full display at the most recent NDP convention in June of 2011. Rather than the question of policy vision for the country, debate was dominated by the question of whether or not the word ‘socialism’ ought to be removed from the preamble of the party’s constitution. The fact that even those pushing for its removal argued there was no shifting of principle involved, but merely a question of what wording would be easiest to ‘sell’ to the wider Canadian public, provides further evidence of the party’s focus on ensuring the framing of the party and its message fit comfortably within the accepted status quo.

The shift in framing away from the CCF’s traditional socialist and social democratic framings and towards those more commonly held by the Canadian public, earlier identified as

being in its early stages in the late 1960s and early 1970s, was fully developed by the 2000s. Where early campaigns reflected traditional frames such as the redistribution of wealth and class oppositions and featured big new programs to solve common problems (think, for example, of the introduction of pensions or publicly-funded health care), the framing of platforms and campaign slogans throughout the last decade referenced the benefits that individuals, or individual families, could expect from an NDP government, with slogans such as the 2006 “Getting Results for People”, or the 2011 “Working for Families”. The latter slogan was further supported by a range of ‘pocketbook’ policies (Fig. 2), reflecting issues which dominated a campaign focused on policies ranging from lowering taxes on heating fuel to capping credit card fees. Such issues were designed, due to the necessity for them to be used in election-period broadcast advertising, to fit much more clearly within the paradigm of the current society, rather than challenging it head on as early CCF framing had done.

Given the degree to which the framing had adjusted to fit within commonly shared frames present in the mass of society, Gramsci’s ‘common sense’, the party could no longer rely on significant policy differences in order to differentiate itself from the other electoral choices. As a result, there was also a further framing shift, the early stages of which were noted in the first turning point discussion above, towards a focus on the leader and the personalization of the political choice. This leader focus meshed well for the party with the centralizing of message and structure, as the figure of Jack Layton became the message and symbolic figure around which the party’s electoral communications were built. As seen in Figure 3, the message “This is Canadian Leadership” became one of the central themes of the campaign, setting the issue of which leader Canadians wanted for their Prime Minister as the key ‘ballot box’ question. This met with



Jack Layton
NDP

PRACTICAL FIRST STEPS IN THE FIRST 100 DAYS

HIRE MORE DOCTORS AND NURSES

We'll start training more doctors and nurses, and give doctors that have left Canada incentives to come back home.

STRENGTHEN YOUR PENSION

We'll work with the provinces to double your public pension and offer you more choice over your retirement savings.

KICK-START JOB CREATION

We'll give small businesses a 2 percentage points tax cut, and bring in targeted tax credits for companies that hire here in Canada.

HELP OUT YOUR FAMILY BUDGET

We'll cap credit card fees at prime+5, take the federal sales tax off home heating, and give consumers control over cell phone bills.

FIX OTTAWA FOR GOOD

We'll stop the scandals and commit to work with other parties to get things done for you.

Photo not authorized by the official agent for the candidate

Tammy Schoep

FOR DURHAM

JOIN TEAM LAYTON
IN DURHAM

289.240.2833 | TammySchoep@ndp.ca
www.TammySchoep.ndp.ca

Figure 2



**THIS IS
CANADIAN
LEADERSHIP**

**Jack
Layton
NDP**

ndp.ca

Canadian leadership.
It's about putting your family first.
And helping out your family budget.
It's leadership you can trust to
fix Ottawa.
Under Stephen Harper, the
well-connected insiders are getting
all of the breaks. And the endless
Liberal-style scandals mean
nothing's getting done for you.
That's wrong.
As your Prime Minister, I'll take
practical steps to make your life
more affordable.
I'll tackle the urgent issues facing
our frontline health care.
And I'll clean up Ottawa and
work with others to get things
done for you.
That's Canadian leadership.



Figure 3

success in the 2011 election, particularly in Quebec where the electorate's love for Jack overcame a near total lack of local campaigns to deliver the party 59 of the province's 75 seats. However the fragility of this success, built as it was almost wholly on the appeal of the leader rather than the building of a bloc which supported the party's programme, was demonstrated by the serious questions the party was left facing when that leader succumbed to cancer only 3 months after his party's electoral success.

If in part these shifts in framing reflected conscious decisions made by the party, they were also to a degree forced on the party by a growing dependence on broadcast advertising and the air war. As noted in the first turning point section, and in the discussion of McLuhan's work in the last chapter, radio and television have distinctive effects on the content they transmit, both in terms of how it is received by audiences, and in terms of choices that parties make about how to shape the messages being broadcast. The increased use of slogans noted first in the late 1960s, a result of the party's early uses of television, became an ever more crucial part of a campaign where these air war ads had shifted from being a small part of a larger campaign budget to, by the 2011 election, representing the vast majority of the expenditures in the campaign.

Television commercials, as discussed by McLuhan, are a particularly emotion-laden medium, and this nature supported the framing move noted above to an increasing reliance on emotional (and personal) connections to the party/leader rather than policy issue discussion. While much has been made of the effectiveness of negative advertising, federal NDP strategists knew that there were differences in the way that different audiences reacted to these ads. In a presentation (Topp 2011) to the Saskatchewan NDP caucus a month after the election, one of the key architects of the 2011 campaign noted that negative ads had the tendency to motivate older, male voters (who tended to vote Conservative), while driving down motivation and turnout in

other demographics. As a result, though the party relied increasingly on emotional advertising, he suggested that the focus instead was on *propositional* ‘contrast’ advertising – with implicit or humorous attacks on opponents accompanied by proposals for alternate ideas. However, due to the limitations of such ads in terms of their wide broadcast and limited times, these ads relied heavily on framings and issues the public was already familiar with and supportive of. If Kim Campbell wasn’t necessarily entirely right that campaigns were no time to talk about policy, television commercials certainly weren’t the place to do it.

An increased use of the internet and social media in the most recent campaigns in 2008 and 2011 may appear to hold more potential for disruption of the unidirectional broadcast nature of communication. However, despite the ability of these mediums to serve as a site of two-way communication and engagement, in reality the way in which they were used was limited to a ‘Web 1.0’, or broadcast, style of communication. While the party increasingly saw websites, Facebook, Twitter, and even a smartphone app as important means of distributing a message to potential voters, in particular those in younger demographics, these media were not used to disrupt the one-way flow of information from the party to the voter/member, but rather to reinforce it. Where Rahaf Harfoush (2009), one of the architects of the social media strategy employed by the ’08 Obama campaign (a campaign which will be considered in the next chapter in terms of its potential insights), highlights the ways in which that campaign used the two-way nature of the new tools of Web 2.0 and social media to build relationships with supporters – with all the messiness, lack of control, and constant feedback those entail – the NDP’s use of these tools in federal elections to date have maintained the ‘passive consent’ discussed earlier. Even the ‘app’ created by the party for the 2011 election avoided interaction, pushing content (photos,

messages, and videos of TV advertisements) to supporters but with only the ability to channel donations in the other direction.

Is it 'Plausible'?

The goal of this chapter was to use the case of the CCF/NDP to engage in what Eckstein termed a 'plausibility probe' – to test whether there existed grounds to support a strong enough belief in the validity and potential value of the theory proposed to justify a more thorough study. Though this represents an admittedly brief study of a single case, I would argue that the evidence above demonstrates the plausibility of the theory developed earlier, and that a more detailed and thorough study is called for.

Over the course of this chapter a clear trend towards professionalization has been identified, one that reflects the hypothesized effects suggested by the preceding chapters. That is not to say that there is only a single narrative at work – there are clear moments of resistance, and at times even evidence of developments (e.g. the three-canvass 'system' of the mid-1960s) that suggest the potential of different options for development. Over time, however, the general trend of development shows evidence of many of the expected effects occurring.

In the case of the relationship between the party and voters, the theoretical analysis proposed that as professionalization progressed there would be a shift towards increasingly instrumental and unidirectional relationships. As a consequence, it was suggested that the relationship between the party and voter would be characterized by attempts to secure a strategic result, the vote, rather than to develop mutual agreement on the party's goals, and that communication between the party and voters would become simplified, eschewing complex arguments in favour of those which held less potential for confusion. Within the limitations of

this study, such a process appears to be at work over the course of the development of the CCF/NDP's relationship with the voting public.

The theory also proposed that these developments would affect the relationship between the constituent parts of the party, leading to an increased centralization of control and reliance on a vanguard-populist style view of the party's role. It was also suggested that a significantly diminished intermediate element would undercut the ethical relationship between the party core and the mass element, with a consequent breakdown of the kind of active, direct consent prized by Gramsci and its replacement with a more passive form of consent. A consideration of the historical trends above show a clear demonstration of the expected effects, though with some limitations on the centralization of the party as a result of the unique federal-provincial structure and attempts to placate Quebec nationalists. In particular, however, the shift from active to passive consent is clearly evident, as are the moments of resistance to this contained within the arguments of many of those associated with the Waffle and NPI movements.

The arational aspects of the NDP's communicative history are more difficult to make a clear pronouncement on. While the theory would suggest that the frames and mythic aspects of the content of arguments would begin to contradict the goals intended within the arguments, the limits of this case study make a firm finding on this difficult. In addition, as a great deal of the work of framing and the significance-making of myth occurs in the respondent, rather than in a way objectively accessible in the argument itself, the simple study of advertisements outside of their context and audience is insufficient. Even given these limitations, however, I would argue that the glimpses of framing shifts and the increased reliance on the symbolic figure of the leader, with its inherent support for the centralization and personalization of politics proves sufficient to suggest the value of further study, and thus meets Eckstein's test for plausibility.

Finally, the theoretical analysis proposed that the medium of communication should be considered in terms of its intrinsic and extrinsic effects. It suggested that the effects of the media used by professional political parties would work in conjunction with the effects already considered to create further problems for progressive counter-hegemonic movements by limiting the complexity of arguments and shifting debate away from ambiguity and towards an increasingly polarized political sphere. Again, though the study contained in this chapter is of necessity brief, there is ample evidence in the increased use of simplified slogans and the heightened reliance in rallies and television commercials on personalized and leader-focused symbols, to suggest that the argument is plausible enough to justify further – and more comprehensive – study.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The preceding chapter used the case of the CCF/NDP to consider the plausibility of the theoretical model laid out earlier in this study. Within the limitations of a brief, single-case study, the arguments made in terms of relationships with voters, internal structure, arational framing and medium effects appear to be plausible, though it still remains an open question as to whether or not these results are emblematic of a general trend, or merely represent a unique case in the Canadian context. It is important to be aware, however, of the limitations of the ‘plausibility probe’ method. While it is useful as a means to consider how well a particular case reflects the proposed theoretical model, there is a danger of finding what one sets out to find, as the way in which the historical narrative is constructed, and the time periods focused on, have an effect on the shape of the story told. However, within the limits of what it is – namely a means by which to parsimoniously probe whether the theory appears plausible enough to justify more extensive research – the method is adequate to the limited means and aims of a Master’s thesis.

The plausibility of the model, however, suggests that further research is called for in order to determine the degree to which these results might be generalized beyond this case. Such work should be focused on examining the validity of the theory in two directions. First, an attempt should be made to study each aspect of the model in greater depth, utilizing the types of tools that would allow for an assessment as to the extent to which the expected changes are present as well as the degree to which these changes are causing the proposed effects. Secondly, comparative research should be used to determine to what extent the findings are generalizable to other parties, either progressive or conservative, and in other contexts. For the sake of simplicity, the suggestions for research below are grouped into the four areas developed throughout the preceding chapters.

Further Research

In terms of the first area, study is needed to confirm the hypothesized effects of the changing relationship between parties and voters. While the theoretical argument that a shift to strategic rather than communicative action will lead to an emphasis on winning votes rather than converts appears to be plausible in the case of the NDP, further research is needed to assess the extent to which different forms of contact between parties and voters achieve these disparate ends. Some research in this area has been done²⁶ but to a large extent it has been limited to studies of different forms of communication within the strategic orientation, or else to a single measure which fails to consider the difference between short and long term support. A study which more clearly compared communicative action and strategic action as to their effects in terms of electoral support and longer-term party identification would go a long way towards confirming or challenging many of the arguments made in the first part of Chapter 3. Research to confirm the tendency of communication tactics in the strategic orientation towards simplified arguments and away from complexity would also be of benefit, requiring a comparison over a period of time and across multiple parties to determine to what extent the actual materials and arguments distributed by parties show evidence of simplification of arguments.

In terms of the second area, the arguments surrounding the effects of the changing relationship between the constituent parts of the party require a more comprehensive study of the

²⁶ For studies that represent attempts to deal with aspects of the question of the impact of various forms of communicative relationships between parties and voters see: Pfau, Cho & Chong (2001) for a consideration of various forms of mass media; McLeod, Scheufele & Moy (1999) for a comparison of the impacts of interpersonal communication and mass media communication on political participation rates; and Campus, Pasquino & Vaccari (2008) for a comparison of the influence of interpersonal networks and mass media on voting tendencies. In particular, see the edited volume *Politics, Media, and Modern Democracy* (Swanson and Mancini 1996b) for a comparative look at varying effects in individual Western countries. Note that although some findings support aspects of the arguments made here, none focus specifically on a party's use of different techniques, nor do they adequately differentiate between short term (vote) and long term (convert) effects of such communication.

centralization of progressive parties and the decline of intermediaries, focused on the effects of this shift in terms of the type of engagement of supporters, either active or passive, and in terms of the extent to which the party begins to demonstrate evidence of a shift towards a vanguard-populist mentality. Such study might include membership numbers and engagement by members in more active ways (during elections, leadership races, or policy conventions) but should also involve more qualitative research to expose the ways in which party members see their own role and their degree of involvement/engagement as active or passive. On the other hand, the degree to which the party manifests a vanguard-populist style view of the role of the party leadership is more likely to be found through a study of party communications, policy shifts, and public statements than through a direct study of those in leadership positions, due to the desire of progressive parties to maintain an egalitarian image.

In part because it is one of the least-studied areas, as noted in Chapter 4, the arational framing of arguments is perhaps one of the most important areas for further research. Such research should combine both a comparative study of framings utilized and the degree of symbolic focus on the leader with more in-depth qualitative study of the ways in which audiences, both supporters and non-supporters, react to the framing of advertisements and other party materials. Such qualitative study is necessary to access the inter-relational way in which the significance and meaning-making of framing occurs, as any study focused solely on content analysis of advertisements will only be able to provide insights into what parties are *intending* to communicate, rather than how such communications are in fact processed by audiences.

Finally, though much of the needed research on the effects of particular mediums of communication on the reception of their messages will fall within the research done in the first area, noted above, such research should be extended to incorporate the findings from cognitive

science research laid out in Chapter 4. In particular, the degree to which specific mediums encourage content which is more readily accepted or integrated by conservatives or progressives should be of particular interest, as, if these findings are supported, parties which rely on techniques that are less effective for their own supporters place themselves at a disadvantage from the start.

Implications for Progressive Parties

Though the validity and generalizability of this theory have yet to be proven, the preceding chapter suggests that it at least meets Eckstein's criteria for plausibility and thus that its implications for progressive parties ought to be considered. Having laid out above the research that remains in order to ascertain the extent to which this theory fits the real world of political maneuvering, the remainder of this chapter will be concerned with examining what the insights provided thus far might mean for progressive political parties in terms of both an assessment of current tactics, and in terms of their prescriptions for how to handle the decisions facing these parties as they move forward in pursuit of their goals.

First of all, a recognition of what this theory is *not* saying. Despite the dangers this theory highlights in progressive parties' embrace of professionalized tactics, as in the case of the air war, for example, this should not be read as a call to return to some glorified golden age. The theoretical insights above are not intended to imply that it is either necessary or even desirable to return to the door-to-door tactics of the early CCF. What is of interest here is not the particular tools or techniques, which are in all cases impacted by the context in which a party is operating, but rather the effects of these tools and techniques on the party utilizing them. This study should not be read as an indictment of any particular development, such as the air war, in all situations and for all left parties. It should instead be taken as a strong caution against the commonly-held

belief that tactical developments and changes in how political parties communicate with, organize, and mobilize their supporters can be seen as unbiased, and that as a result what works in one context, and for a particular ideology, will work equally well for others. What is needed is recognition of the limits of particular techniques, and the impact of given techniques on the areas outlined in this work.

A return to the questions outlined in the introduction provides some grounding for a consideration of what the theory outlined thus far has to offer for parties concerned with this question. In the introduction, I stated that the key questions that would be developed throughout the thesis were:

- What are the effects of tactical developments on the relationship between the party and the voters, and consequently the ability of communication to be persuasive?
- What are the effects of tactical developments on the relationship between the constituent parts of the party, (i.e. between the party and the greater mass it must mobilize to meet its goals), and what effects do these relationship changes have on the party?
- Do the arational characteristics of these tactical developments support or contradict the goals expressed in their content?
- Do the effects, both extrinsic and intrinsic, of any developments in the means of communication support or contradict the ends of the party?

Though these questions will provide some basis for a framework for progressive parties operating in the modern context to use to make decisions around tactics and techniques, it is

important to realize the limitations of practical implementation of theoretical insights. Even with these questions in mind, the reality of politics in the modern context means that political parties will not always have the freedom to be able to pick and choose what tactics they use to reach voters. As a result, beyond simply a consideration of the limitations of tactics in terms of some of these areas, political parties need to find ways to balance the negative impacts of particular tactical choices in terms of one or more of these areas by finding other ways to meet the needs that may be unmet. In the end, the true value of the theoretical work done thus far in this study will be determined by the degree to which it allows parties to find alternate, or complementary, ways of communicating with, organizing, and mobilizing their supporters which better allow them to achieve their ends, both in terms of the immediate need for votes, and in terms of the longer-term desire for counter-hegemonic change.

After all, the consequences of failure on the part of these parties are dire, as Bradford points out, drawing on the work of Chantal Mouffe:

it is worth reiterating the flaws, well known to Canadians, of brokerage politics. First, the absence of substantive partisan debate trivializes the political discourse leading to a preoccupation with personal foibles, campaign gaffes, and negative advertising. Similarly, spectacular policy failures or flipflops often result when governments with no popular mandate for action attempt reforms. The problem is compounded by the fact that brokerage parties govern in isolation from societal organizations and party activists who would otherwise be available to help advance or defend the government's agenda, and assist in policy implementation. In fact, significant policy shifts in the brokerage system often end up proceeding by bureaucratic "stealth" with the public and parties on the sidelines. Over time the party system is drained of representational and policy capacity, and citizens become increasingly disengaged. As Chantal Mouffe writes: "democracy requires the creation of collective identities around clearly differentiated positions as well as the possibility to choose between real alternatives." The task "is to redefine the left in order to reactivate the democratic struggle, not to proclaim its obsolescence." (Bradford 2002:155)

It is to the pursuit of this task that the rest of this chapter is dedicated. Regardless of what technology is available, or what choices are made about how best to use it, the first step is recognizing what is needed. As seen clearly in the case of the Obama excitement and disappointment, and as laid out decades earlier by Gramsci, what is needed for hegemonic change is a deeper and more active involvement than that represented by mere electoral victory. One of the most important aspects of the early CCF work was the focus on education, and on small-group meetings that allowed potential supporters to engage with ideas that were entirely new to them, and to be a part of shaping how the idea of liberation and equality actually fit into their own lives. In much the same way, Gramsci's early years were characterized by a focus on education and empowerment of workers in the factories, rather than a simple focus on winning their votes at an election. A convert can be counted on to vote for the party she supports, but a voter cannot likewise be counted upon to support the party that she voted for – a lesson that Obama learned quickly when he attempted to implement his health care plan, for which there had been great passive support, but little active engagement.

This pre-revolutionary work which Gramsci sees as necessary is not limited to progressive parties²⁷, but as the early CCF organizers knew, it is of particular importance for parties which are proposing drastic shifts in the status quo. While the discussion thus far has focused on the effects of professionalization, the theoretical analysis in chapters 3 and 4 also provides insight into the types of features which progressive parties should be attempting to ensure are a part of their communications and organizing tactics. First among these is the

²⁷ For instance, Kozolanka (Pol. Of Persuasion) identifies the ways in which the 'new right' worked in this fashion to develop the groundwork for changes they implemented in Ontario in the 1990s once they had attained state control.

recognition, building on the work of Habermas and Gramsci, of the crucial importance of bidirectional communication for the development of relationships with audiences built on the type of active consent that is crucial to the liberating potential of the counter-hegemonic project. Secondly, and related to the first, is the importance of the redevelopment of the intermediate element within parties, a necessary aspect of supporting that type of active consent and avoiding the temptation of centralized structures. Finally, the insights of those who study framing and the ‘arational’ serve as a fitting reminder that rational argumentation is only one part of the canvas, and that the framing of both the content of arguments and the medium by means of which that content is delivered to voters need to work with, instead of against, the rational content.

Encouraging two-way communication

In the case of the need for bidirectional communication, the realities of the modern situation may seem to limit the ability of parties to make use of these types of communication. After all, accepting that modernization changes have had effects on the labour resources of parties which are at least difficult to reverse, if not impossible, how are parties to pursue these types of relationships in a professionalized context? Fittingly, as it was technological development that played a part in bringing parties to the point they are now at, it is also in the realm of technological development that an example of one possible answer to this dilemma can be found. The developments making up what is often termed Web 2.0²⁸ offer the potential, if parties are courageous enough to pursue them, to develop new means of allowing for, and encouraging, bidirectional relationships between the party and voters. But what does a new

²⁸ Web 2.0 refers to recent developments in the last decade enabling more interactive, user-generated, and dynamic content; in contrast to Web 1.0, which refers to earlier, more static and broadcast-style web content such as early web pages or news sites. It is important to acknowledge, as Harrison and Barthel (2009) point out, that the notion of collaboratively generated content is not revolutionary – the unique aspect of being able to do so online, however, is specific to the Web 2.0 context.

direction in web development mean for the future of political parties? In their choice in 2006 of 'You' as the person of the year, Time magazine argued that

It's a story about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before. It's about the cosmic compendium of knowledge Wikipedia and the million-channel people's network YouTube and the online metropolis MySpace. It's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes.

The tool that makes this possible is the World Wide Web. Not the Web that Tim Berners-Lee hacked together (15 years ago, according to Wikipedia) as a way for scientists to share research. It's not even the overhyped dotcom Web of the late 1990s. The new Web is a very different thing. It's a tool for bringing together the small contributions of millions of people and making them matter. Silicon Valley consultants call it Web 2.0, as if it were a new version of some old software. But it's really a revolution. (Grossman 2006; my emphasis)

There are two key aspects of this development for political parties in terms of the theory outlined above. First, this technological development for the first time makes it possible for a very small number of people working centrally for a party to carry on an interactive 'conversation' with millions of others. Where early technological changes incorporated into the air war allowed the party's central machine to talk 'at' an increasing number of people through radio, TV, and the polling that enabled broadcast and micro-targeted advertising, these changes were limited in that they only allowed conversation to move in one direction – from the party, to the audience, enforcing a passivity of spectator-like behavior from the wider public. Despite what the fan yelling at her favourite hockey team might fantasize, her shouts have no effect on those displayed in millions of liquid crystals in front of her. In the case of the interactivity of forums, small discussion groups, and user-generated pictures/videos/songs, however, developments in the software used to interact with the public allows central party staff to engage

with, react to, and be influenced by the work and ideas of the broader audience, moving that audience out of passivity and into a degree of active engagement.

Secondly, as noted in the emphasized section of the quote above, these tools also amplify the work of individuals; allowing them to make small contributions that, when combined with the millions of others engaged in the same actions, have effects far beyond any that the individual could have achieved alone. A clear example of this can be found in the fundraising success of the 2008 Barack Obama campaign. Eschewing the traditional reliance on large donors for substantial donations, the campaign focused on building an online base of donors engaged with the campaign who could only donate small amounts. Utilizing this strategy, the campaign raised \$500 Million in these online donations alone, as compared to the McCain campaign, which raised \$360 Million total and only \$50 Million of that through online donations (Harfoush 2009). This amplification effect is crucial beyond fundraising as well, as one of the realities identified by the modernization theory authors in the second chapter related to the increased demands on people's time in the modern age, and the consequent difficulties faced by parties attempting to involve volunteers in the same way. While individuals may find it increasingly difficult to commit to a 6-hour door canvass, by using this amplification effect campaigns are able to realize significant progress in voter contact through much smaller commitments of time on the part of any individual voter.

Even before the notion of Web 2.0 had caught on, Caroline Haythornthwaite (2002) was arguing that the development of new media for communication had the potential to have positive effects in terms of the bringing together of what she termed weak-tie networks. By developing a system of latent ties, which enabled a greater ease of communication and interaction between even weakly-tied individuals, these new media created conditions which would have the effect of

strengthening these ties. The exact effects which Haythornthwaite predicted in 2002 have been noted by numerous authors since (c.f. Boulianne 2009; Harfoush 2009; Perez 2008; Livingstone, Bober and Helsper 2005), though the extent to which new media increases engagement remains controversial, depending in large part on the author's definition of new media and measures of engagement. Of particular interest, however, is that such engagement is not necessarily limited to the engagement with new media elements of politics. Instead, as noted in Boulianne's (2009) meta-analysis, increased usage of new media has a positive and significant effect on political engagement in a more traditional sense, suggesting that the increased sense of engagement serves as a gateway for bringing unengaged members of the public back into active involvement with the political process.

In fact, movement organizations have been taking advantage of this effect for several years now, as evidenced by the success and size of such groups as Avaaz, MoveOn.org, and the recent development of a similar Canadian organization, LeadNow. Each of these organizations engages a broad sector of the public through the use of various tools – petitions, email campaigns, letter-writing, discussion groups, and the provision of easily 'share-able' information for use on members' Facebook and Twitter accounts – all of which enable small amounts of time or money to be donated to support a variety of causes. In addition, many of these organizations are able to do so with minimal central staffing, at least in comparison to professional political organizations.

Given all of these advantages, and the proven track record of movement organizations, it may seem strange that parties haven't already taken advantage of these opportunities. To a certain extent, some parties have experimented with implementing aspects of interactive online engagement, most famously the 2008 Obama campaign in the US (Harfoush 2009). Yet even this

experimentation has been shaped by the goals developed by the professionalizing trend considered earlier, as evidenced in the Obama case by the degree to which these engagement efforts were targeted solely at electoral victory, and were for the most part wound down following the election. The goal development spoken of here is the shift noted earlier away from views that see the role of the party in terms of longer-term, conversion of supporters efforts, and towards the counter-view that the party's decisions and actions ought to be structured around electoral victory, with all else stemming from that – in Habermasian terms, the shift from the realm of communicative action to that of strategic action.

In fact, from the perspective of those operating in a strategic-action paradigm, the very things that I've suggested here as the benefits of interactive strategies are seen as their greatest weaknesses. First of all, any effort to increase the degree to which audiences can participate, talk back, and engage in conversation and debate represents a loss of control by the centre of the party, and the antithesis of the centralizing efforts represented by much of the professionalization of parties thus far. Furthermore, the weakening of 'message discipline' represented by any attempt at user-generated content that is not fully filtered, screened, and sanitized by central staff is often seen to be too great a threat within a modern media environment where a party's ability to completely control the public message it puts out is seen to represent the party's professionalism and capacity for government.

Rebuilding intermediaries

The same types of tools give insight into one possible way to reverse the decline of the intermediate element. Where much of the development considered in Chapter 2 moved in a single direction, away from interaction and towards a structure that emphasized central control and the reliance on the mass element for fundraising alone (and not necessarily even that, in the

case of Negrine's cartel party), the same style of interactive design that characterizes the online tools of Web 2.0 can be harnessed to return more autonomy and control to the masses of the party by creating more channels for interaction between mass and centre, and by ensuring that these channels work in two directions, not just one. Some parties have experimented with these types of designs in terms of platform design²⁹, but such experiments need to be developed and extended to allow for sustained engagement and real influence on the part of the mass element. In much the same way that fundraisers for non-profit organizations try to encourage a belief on the part of donors that they are engaged in, and actively attached to, these organizations – knowing that the greater the feeling of attachment the more likely such individuals are to donate – parties need to focus on providing such opportunities for engagement and attachment to their wider membership.

What might such a program look like? An example of the type of active engagement of a wider body in decision-making processes can be seen in the use of *participatory budgeting* techniques by locations as varied as New York (Participatory Budgeting in New York City 2012) and Porto Alegre, Brazil (Lewit 2002).³⁰ While these cases are different in that they involve the use of a mixture of new tools (online forums/polls) and old techniques (discussion groups and neighbourhood forums) to engage members of the public in the decision-making processes of local governments, they offer a crucial insight into what a program designed around facilitating a greater level of membership involvement in the decision-making and active work of political

²⁹ Kate Raynes-Goldie and David Fono (2005) provide an analysis of the short-lived use of these tools for platform design in the case of the Green Party of Canada's now-defunct 'Living Platform'.

³⁰ In the Canadian context, the recent launch of the "So You Think You Can Budget" website by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (2011) – building off of their successful Alternative Federal Budget series – represents an attempt to engage citizens more actively, though it remains merely a hypothetical exercise, divorced from providing any real influence over the allocation of federal resources.

parties might look like. The same types of tools and techniques, if implemented in the ways in which a party chooses policy, selects platform themes, and elects representatives could go a long way towards increasing the opportunities for a two-way flow of information and control, and giving the mass element of parties the feeling that they serve a purpose beyond merely bankrolling decisions made by those in the centre of the party.

Such a process is neither simple, nor without its dangers. In order to give more authority and control to the mass element of a party, a significant and sustained program of education and capacity development for members would be required in order to ensure that they have the necessary level of understanding of the interplay of various issues to make informed and beneficial decisions. Party members, on the other hand, would also have to be willing to take on the increased responsibilities in terms of time and engagement necessary to make such a process work. This type of program of education and capacity development, though it figured prominently into both Gramscian views of the role of labour movements and the early practices of social democratic movements such as the CCF, represents a significant shift in priorities away from the electoral focus, with no guarantee of immediate, or even short-term, electoral benefits, yet without some movement in this direction parties risk further distancing members from those in the party's centre, and thus encouraging the kind of passive support characteristic of the vanguard-populist party, with all of the consequent shortcomings noted above.

Frames and mediums that work

In terms of the arational aspect of communication and organizing, Lakoff is absolutely right to point out the need for progressive parties to pay attention to more than the rational content of their arguments, and to make every effort to ensure that the framing they use reflects the ideology they wish to encourage. However, his prescriptions remain limited by the fact that

he is resolutely focused on altering progressive messages to fit within the restrictions of the types of mediums that conservatives are using, shaping the message to fit the medium and giving no thought to the potential alternatives. Instead, what is needed is for progressive parties to develop, building on the work of theorists like McLuhan and Innis, an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of various mediums, and to design their communication strategy around the targets they are trying to reach and the message they are trying to send, instead of the reverse. The same energy that is currently spent selecting the proper shows during which to advertise in order to best reach targeted segments of the population should be directed into ensuring that the balance of mediums used is best able to reach the voters that are most likely to support the party's objectives. If cognitive science research is suggesting that the types of advertisements and framings which work on television are likely to be most effective in reaching voters with a conservative alignment, it is little surprise that conservative parties continue to use them. The fact that they do, however, should not mean that progressive parties merely adapt their framings and try to engage conservatives on their home turf. By trying to engage primarily in the same media strategies as conservatives, progressive parties are starting the fight at a disadvantage. Instead, they need to develop a clearer understanding of what types of communication contain features, such as a support for ambiguity and complexity, and a greater ability to engage in bidirectional communication and debate (e.g. tools such as those outlined above with regards to online interactive organizing), which are more congruent in their form with the content of progressive arguments. Once this understanding is developed, progressive parties will be able to weight their focus on a variety of communication tactics in the same way they currently weight their choice of programs and channels to advertise on, and thus will be able to ensure that they are entering the electoral battle on terrain as friendly to them as possible.

None of these changes is easily undertaken – nor is the implementation of new strategies free of risk. But this is the challenge that progressive parties face, and, if the arguments developed above have merit, it is one that they continue to ignore at their peril. The challenge is to shake the ways of thinking that suggest that only short-term electoral victory is necessary, or even desirable, the vanguard-populist view of parties that ignore the crucial intermediary element that maintains and strengthens the two-way connections between mass and centre, and the belief that the framing and media used are irrelevant to the successful delivery of a rational message. What is crucial is the shift in thinking that underlies the technological and tactical decisions. The particular technologies are far less important than this shift, for there will always be technological developments that offer new ways of communicating with, organizing, and mobilizing supporters. Context matters – this isn't an argument that progressive parties need merely to use social media, or Web 2.0, or any other particular technique in order to succeed. Those sorts of flavour-of-the-month proposals are made constantly, and with little effect and less importance. What is needed instead is the development of a framework that recognizes that the success of progressive parties in terms of their implementation of counter-hegemonic changes depends both on their ability to win the electoral support of the public and also their ability to convert members of the public to their ideological views, and that then allows for decisions to be made about which technologies and tactics ought to be implemented and which ones avoided. Some current tactics will continue to be used, albeit likely to a different degree of emphasis, some will be replaced by new or different ones which more adequately perform the necessary functions. The constantly-evolving nature of political competition means that no stasis is likely to be achieved, and neither should one be sought. But the presence of a framework by which to

judge the suitability and desirability of these evolutionary choices on a basis other than their mere successful implementation by a different party in a different context is a useful starting point. Such a framework may at least provide progressive parties with the ability to ensure that the choices they make are made in the interests of providing the kind of support they need, electoral and otherwise, to create real change. Only then can they begin to reverse the course of a trend which is, as Blumler and Coleman argue, “sucking both the substance and the spirit out of the politics it projects” (2001:4).

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