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CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN NATIONAL AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH: THE CASE OF THE JOHN BIRCH SOCIETY

Pamela Oliver and Mark Furman

Earlier in this decade, there was a flurry of debate about whether "strong" organizations help or hinder the efforts of aggrieved populations to achieve social change. As Jenkins (1983) said in his review, the answer to this question clearly depends on who is being organized for what. But even Jenkins' review implies that all organizations can be arrayed on a single dimension, with "no organization" at one pole, "strong organization" at the other pole, and "weak organization" somewhere in the middle. "Strong organizations" are seen as those which develop a stable resource base, have a coherent organizational structure capable of unified action, and control a large mass base of members who are mobilized for action.

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But "organizational strength" is not really a single dimension. Our thesis is that the features which make for a strong national organization with a sound financial base are different from those which foster active mobilization of the membership. The problems of mobilizing *money* is very different from the problem of mobilizing *action*, and there are inherent organizational tensions created by trying to do both. These tensions can be overcome and some "very strong" organizations manage to do both, at least for a while, but the two kinds of mobilizations really pull organizations in different ways. These tensions can be especially acute for the local chapters of national organizations.

Our thoughts on these matters began with Furman's research on the John Birch Society (JBS), an organization that would be characterized as either "strong" or "weak" depending on the perspective from which it is examined. Looking from the top, the organization has a strong administrative structure, a large financial base derived principally from member contributions, an active publishing operation, and roughly 80,000 members organized into perhaps 4,000 local chapters which are supported by professional field staff. But looking from the bottom, one sees struggling chapters desperate for active members, an absence of a national program for action, and little or no local activity. In seeking to understand this case, we have employed our more unsystematic observations gleaned from years of participation and observation in a variety of movement organizations, and from our reading of published accounts of other organizations. Thus, we end up not with definitive proof for our arguments, but with an empirically and theoretically plausible thesis which can be confirmed or refuted with systematic research.

THE JOHN BIRCH SOCIETY

Sources and Limitations of Data

Furman was a participant observer in a local chapter of the JBS in 1983-1984. He joined the organization, collected literature, interviewed the few members he could find, attended the few meetings and events that were held, and toured the national office. We should stress that the secrecy of the JBS prevents us from knowing whether his experiences in one city may be generalized to chapters in other cities. His experiences are consistent with other published accounts of the JBS (for example Westin 1964; Broyles 1964; Ericson 1982; Forster and Epstein 1964, 1966, 1967; Griffin 1975; Hefley and Hefley 1980; Scott 1980), and we believe that they are probably more typical than not, but we can be relatively certain of the empirical facts only for the geographic area studied. Thus, the case study should be viewed more as an instance illuminating an important feature of movement organizations rather than as a definitive empirical report on the JBS.

It is also important to note that the data may already be outdated concerning the actual status of the JBS, since they were collected during a significant watershed in JBS history. In 1983, Robert Welch, the founder of JBS, stepped down as chair and chose replacements who were expected to continue his course. Congressional Representative Larry McDonald (Georgia), a New Right leader, became the chairman, and long-time staffer Tom Hill became President. In their acceptance speeches, neither Hill nor McDonald indicated any plans to vary from Welch's set course. McDonald died when Korean Airlines flight 007 was shot down by the Soviets, and was replaced by long-time Council member William Grede. Welch himself died in 1985. We do not know whether the deaths of two key leaders have produced major changes in the national organization, and the participant observation did not continue past 1984.

Overview and Background

Despite at least some published speculation that the JBS was nothing more than a media creation which disappeared when the spotlight shifted (Lipset in Crawford 1980, p. 46), the JBS as a national organization is alive and well, even though it has been virtually ignored by the mass media since 1980. In 1983, it claimed between 60,000 and 100,000 members nationwide and a six million dollar budget. It operates two magazines with worldwide distribution, oversees the operation of many local chapters and bookstores in the United States, and is computerizing its operations at its national headquarters.

The JBS is the organizational embodiment of Robert Welch. Welch became known in the early 1950s for accusing Dean Acheson and others of being Communist agents. He developed his own version of conspiracy theory in which socialists, proponents of the welfare state, and big capitalists are all agents of a conspiracy to bring all economic power under the control of one world government; this theory was circulated privately in a manuscript called *The Politician*. Welch believed that his own failed primary campaign in 1949, the failed Taft campaign, and McCarthy's downfall showed the importance of a strong and disciplined movement organization independent of the constraints of electoral politics (Griffin 1975, p. 152). In late 1958, Welch founded the JBS at a two-day seminar in Indianapolis attended by 11 friends and potential supporters (Welch 1969, p. viii; Broyles 1964, p. 11-12; Schomp 1970, pp. 34-35). The structure, ideology, and future goals and tactics of the JBS outlined by Welch at that meeting, and now codified in *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society* (Welch 1969), remain the blueprint for the organization.

The organization grew quickly. A national headquarters was rapidly set up, and local chapters were organized around the country (Broyles 1964, Griffin 1975, pp. 275-296). Initial projects included petition drives to impeach Chief

Justice Earl Warren and to have the United States withdraw from the United Nations, and the CASE Project (Committee Against Summit Entanglements) which placed newspaper advertisements and circulated petitions to protest Khrushchev's visits with Eisenhower (Griffin 1975, p. 278).

The Society and Welch became a news "story" when *The Politician* reached the mass media (Griffin 1975, Ch. XIV). Most newsworthy were his claims that Milton Eisenhower and Dean Acheson were Communist sympathizers, that there were outright Communist agents in the State Department, and that President Eisenhower condoned this situation. Suddenly the press wanted to know everything about Welch, the Birch Society, and its members. Before 1961, the *New York Times* carried no articles on the JBS or Robert Welch. Beginning in March of that year, over 130 articles, letters, and editorials appeared referring to the JBS and its leaders and actions. Much of this coverage was negative. Those accused of being Communist sympathizers defended themselves and vilified Welch and the JBS. Most conservative politicians struggled to avoid JBS endorsements, although a few aligned themselves with the JBS. There was a great deal of publicity when John Rousellot, a California politician, publicly announced his affiliation and became director of field relations for JBS. Its campaigns to impeach Earl Warren, to get the United States out of the United Nations, and to elect Barry Goldwater, were heavily publicized. Other big stories included the forced resignation of Army General Walker, allegedly a Bircher, for showing his young recruits films and literature alleging Communist infiltration in high government positions and hinting at treason in the State Department (Broyles 1964, pp. 104-105; Forster and Epstein 1967, p. 35), and the revelation that JBS Executive Council member Dr. Revilo Oliver was a rabid anti-Semite and author of many racist tracts.

By 1962, most reading Americans knew that the JBS was an extreme right-wing organization that espoused a conspiracy theory of history, saw Communists all over the Federal government, and was prone to wild accusations. Even though the JBS officially opposed the Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), it was widely perceived as a repository for anti-Semites, racists, and other kooks. There was even a popular song lampooning it. JBS became a national symbol for right-wing extremism.

Although much of this coverage was negative, the JBS was able to use this attention to its own advantage. It was already expanding when the media blitz began and it was ready to handle the influx of inquiries and new members. In 1960, the JBS expanded office space and staff (largely with funds from Welch and a few major donors including Nelson Baker Hunt), organized the first Executive Council meeting, and sent Welch on a speaking tour promoting new chapters (Griffin 1975, p. 275). The organization grew rapidly, with membership approaching 100,000 by 1963.

The "issue attention cycle" (Downs 1972) ran its course and coverage of the JBS declined precipitously after 1967. As this was happening, Welch and others

broadened their version of the conspiracy, believing that both Communists and Capitalist Internationalists were controlled by The Insiders (Allen 1971; Smoot 1962, 1973; Griffin 1964, 1971, 1975). Their ideology was similar to Fascist anti-Semitic conspiracy theory, except that the Insiders are not equated with Jews. This shift widened the gap between traditional conservatives and the extreme right when, for example, Welch argued that the United States should pull out of the Vietnam war because it was really being fought to enrich the American power structure. The change was unpalatable to many key leaders, including Gerald Schomp, Tom Davis, and the most externally-visible member, John Rousellot, who left with a vocal public denunciation (Schomp 1970, pp. 137-140, 174-177).

It is responsible to suppose that many rank-and-file members left during this period as well, but they were replaced by new members who were attracted by the new ideology. The JBS broadened its grievance base beyond patriotic anticommunism and tapped into an ideological and cultural current developing in the radical right in this period. The Society now appealed not only to good patriots, but to those opposed to a large federal government, taxes, civil rights and student movements, loose lifestyles, crime, and anything that contributed to a world government.

The National Organization of the John Birch Society

The JBS is organized like a business (Schomp 1970, p. 175). Welch's role was like that of a president and chief executive officer, advised by a board of directors called the Executive Council. Different divisions reporting to the national leadership carry out the separate functions of the organization. One division produces and disseminates *The Birch Bulletin*, *American Opinion*, and *Review of the News*, which are sent to members and subscribers. Another produces and sells books by Western Islands Press and other right-wing publishers. A third division operates a warehouse in Belmont, Massachusetts which supplies American Opinion bookstores across the country with literature and books. The bookstores themselves are somewhat independent. Their managers have some discretion, although they cannot carry books banned by the JBS, such as Nazi, KKK, racist, or anti-Semitic literature. They operate on their own budgets, but are subsidized, if necessary, by the national organization.

Another division is in charge of membership services and recruitment. The country is split into several regions, each having a full-time paid regional coordinator. The regional coordinator supervises a staff of paid field coordinators who organize and support the local chapters in their region. Each chapter has no more than 30 members; chapter leaders are unpaid. The chapter structure was modelled after the cellular organization of the Communist Party as Welch understood it.

Another concept borrowed from the Communists was front organizations, single-issue organizations created by the parent organization. Front organizations, which hide their ties to the parent organization, can attract potential recruits who would be afraid of the extremism of the parent organization, and can influence public opinion by avoiding the parent organization's stigma. Major JBS front groups in the 1960s were TRAIN (supporting U.S. withdrawal from the United Nations), the Committee to Impeach (Chief Supreme Court Justice) Earl Warren, and SYLP (Support Your Local Police). In recent years, however, most of these front groups have been dissolved. Only TRIM (Tax Reform Immediately) is active now, and it openly acknowledges its links with the JBS.

Although it no longer forms fronts of its own, the JBS still attaches itself to various causes such as opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment for women, tax reform, prayer in schools, opposition to trade with the Eastern Bloc nations, and the demand to continue searching for those Missing in Action from the Vietnam war. New members are still brought in through particular issues. For example, the leader of the local chapter studied became involved in the JBS by looking for a tax reform group. After reading their literature and seeing the whole picture, he became more involved with the JBS as a whole entity, but he still was mainly interested in tax reform and most of his activities addressed this issue.

Mobilizing Money at the National Level

The JBS claims an annual budget of \$6 million. Members pay yearly dues of \$24 for men and \$12 for women. With the maximum membership estimate of 100,000, this means that no more than \$2 million (and probably closer to \$1 million) is accounted for by member dues. The JBS does not permit inspection of their financial records, but it is possible to make some guesses about their budget. Everyone in the JBS says that the bulk of the money comes from members. This would imply average donations on the order of \$60 to \$100 per member, a plausible figure, given that some members are extremely wealthy. Actual average contributions could be much lower than this. Although the publishing and bookstore operations do not seem to be making large profits, many of the materials are sold, rather than given away, and their cash flows could account for a significant portion of the claimed operating budget, even if they only break even or are subsidized by dues and donations.

It is reasonable to suppose that the JBS has other sources of income, as well. It thrived through nearly 20 years of media neglect, during a time when public opinion ebbed and flowed and competing New Right organizations grew up. This fact strongly suggests some organizational mechanism for dampening out the effects of the volatility of "marketlike" sources of income for a movement organization (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Oliver 1983). Member-

ships, donations, and literature sales are all likely to be very uneven from year to year, due to factors like recent political events and the state of the economy. The fact that the JBS cites its membership figures with a very large range, 60,000-100,000, is evidence that they experience some of these problems.

It is known that Welch put a great deal of his own money into the JBS and that there were other major financial backers of the organization. It is also known that most of the national leaders of JBS are independent businessmen who, presumably, know how to keep business solvent. It is logical to infer that some portion of past revenues were invested, either in capitalizing the business operations or in creating endowments for the organization, to permit it to ride out lean periods. Saving and investing are widely regarded in the world of charitable and political contributions as highly unethical. But this norm is unlikely to deter the JBS, since it zealously guarded its administrative secrets, never filed for tax-exempt status, was always tightly controlled by Welch (a businessman who repeatedly stressed the importance of forming a strong organization), and was negatively regarded by the public at large, anyway.

To say that we suspect the JBS of being organizationally rational is not to say that it is nothing more than a business venture. The sale and distribution of literature appears at best to break even, and is probably subsidized. The JBS seems fundamentally to be an ideological organization whose goal is to get its message out to as many people as possible. Attempts are made to make the message pay for itself, but getting it out is what is most important. Its literature cleaves to its ideological line, and does not pander to the mass market. Our speculation is that it has behaved rationally to preserve itself as an organization that can disseminate its ideology, not that it has placed profit above ideology.

Recipe for Survival of a National Organization

Although out of the public and academic eye for nearly 20 years, the JBS has not faded away. It is not IBM, but in the world of social movement organizations (SMOs), it looks solid. We can identify some of the reasons for its persistence. Like prior right-wing organizations, the JBS was dominated by its founder (Lipset 1964; Lipset and Raab 1970; Redkop 1968; Schoenberger 1969), but unlike his predecessors, Welch believed in the importance of organization and devoted a great deal of attention and resources to creating an organizational structure. When the spotlight turned on the JBS in 1961, it had the structure in place to capture the people and resources flowing in its direction. Even though it was popularly portrayed as dangerous and extreme, it was not damaged by external attacks. Even though "kooks and zanies" were attracted to the organization by the publicity (Schomp 1970), Welch never lost control of the organization to them. This may be contrasted with Giltin's account (1980) of how the Students for a Democratic Society was

changed, disrupted, and ultimately destroyed by the publicity it received. When the spotlight turned away, the JBS had a genuine membership base, a coherent organizational structure, and solid finances. It was in a position to endure.

If it had relied solely on media attention for members, the JBS would have declined through sheer attrition. This appears not to have happened, at least not to the extent that one would expect. Despite its absence from the popular press, the JBS continued to attract new members. The explanation is straightforward. For many years, until the late 1970s, the JBS was the only real organization on the radical right, and thus it attracted and held many members who wanted more than the Republican Party offered but disdained the violence and hatred of the KKK or Nazis. The JBS was the major organized presence in a largely disorganized social movement environment. In its own way, it played the role of what Morris (1984) calls a "movement halfway house," that is, an organization which provides a home for a movement and nurtures adherents to the cause during those periods when it is otherwise dead. The period of intense publicity contributed to this role. Twenty years later, most Americans still know that the JBS is a radical right organization, even if they know little beyond that. People with a right-wing ideology knew where to go if they wanted to join an appropriate organization. This fact, coupled with the more usual process of recruitment through acquaintance networks, provided a continual source of new memberships.

Trouble in the Chapters

This rosy picture of organizational health is not what one sees at the chapter level. There was actually very little to observe in a year's participant observation of a local JBS chapter. Nobody did much of anything except read books, attend speeches or meetings, and distribute leaflets. Only a handful of members did even this much, and even they did these things infrequently.

A leaflet opposing the election of a liberal congressman signed by the Chapter showed it existed, but no one in town (including the College Republicans) had heard of it. A phone call to the national office in Belmont elicited the name of the chapter leader. Once found, the leader hemmed and hawed about when the chapter meetings were, finally admitting that there had not been any for a while due to a lack of interest. The first two meetings scheduled during the observation year were cancelled because the chapter leader and the observer were the only ones planning to come. When there finally was a meeting, only three people attended: the observer, the chapter leader, and one other person. The leader said that there had been about 12 members in the chapter during the previous few years, but no more than four had ever come to a meeting at one time.

The activity at the one meeting was writing letters to Congress on various pieces of New Right legislation suggested by an "action alert" mailing from

the Belmont office. Writers were provided with carbonless paper so that copies could be sent to local newspapers.

It turned out that the election leaflet had been the chapter leader's project; he was assisted by some friends and family members who were not members of the JBS. Another project was an antitax billboard paid for by the leader and a friend who was not a JBS member. In short, all the "actions" of the chapter were really the work of one person and his personal acquaintances. Both projects probably would have been done anyway, whether or not there was a JBS chapter.

The manager of the regional JBS bookstore in a larger city in the region told a story which painted a very similar picture of chapters with very small proportions of active members. When he initially joined at age 18, ten years before, he was "assigned" to one of his city's chapters that was not near his home. Nevertheless, he became friendly with the six other active members. This chapter became inactive when the others all left town due to life changes (marriage, the armed forces, school). After a period of inactivity, this man was reactivated by attendance at a JBS youth camp. This time he was a major chapter leader, and even ran two chapters for a while, another indication that leaders are in short supply. He accepted the part-time job of managing the bookstore, even though he also owns a gasoline service station, because he saw it as a step towards a full-time field organizing position with the JBS. As further evidence of the region-wide ennui in JBS, this bookstore had to close during the observation year for lack of customers.

Only two events generated more widespread participation. These were lecture-seminars given by two JBS speakers sent into the state, one on the general philosophy of the JBS and the other on the issue of accounting for American military personnel missing in action in the Vietnam war. Attendance at each was between 50 and 100 members and their guests drawn from the host city, a larger city about an hour's drive away, and surrounding rural areas. This showed that there was a pool of members and sympathizers in the region, despite their inactivity.

In sum, the JBS barely existed at all as an organization in the area. There was an identifiable pool of adherents, but they did almost nothing. Probably there are a few regions of the country in which significant numbers of JBS members actively participate. However, there is reason to believe that this inactive region is more typical than not. Schomp's (1970) account of his years as a regional coordinator for the JBS during its heyday in the 1960s paints a very similar picture. He says that the members he knew did little but write strange letters to Congress and the media, wave flags, and occasionally march in parades on Independence Day. They rarely went to meetings, even more infrequently recruited new members, and never managed to undertake an effective political action.

Chapter Troubles and Organizational Mistakes

Passivity at the base of a large organization is often taken as a symptom of a "weak" organization, or of an oligarchical national leadership uninterested mobilizing member participation. Such an inference would be wrong for the JBS. It is organizationally quite strong, and it devotes organizational resources to an extensive network of paid field staff who recruit members and aid local leaders. It appears that virtually every potential member receives the personal attention of paid staff.

The two active members interviewed had both been subject to personalized recruitment experiences. The bookstore manager had been recruited by his employer, who insisted that he read Allen's *None Dare Call it Conspiracy*. After his period of inactivity, he was reactivated by attendance at a JBS Youth Camp in the region. These camps are a cross between a recreational summer camp and religious revival-style retreat with daily lectures about the JBS. After being an active chapter leader, he was offered the bookstore position.

The local chapter leader began with an interest in tax reform and collected literature from a wide variety of organizations. He contacted the JBS himself after reading their literature and deciding he liked an organization which had local chapters, rather than just a national mailing list. He was personally visited by a field coordinator who discussed JBS ideology with him, giving special emphasis to tax issues, and left *None Dare Call it Conspiracy* for him to read. The field coordinator also encouraged him to become a chapter leader.

The researcher's experience was very similar. Just for asking questions and being interested, he was approached three months after he was joined by the regional coordinator and asked to become a local chapter leader. (He declined.) Schomp (1970) reports having the same experience in the early 1960s.

These recruitment stories are very telling. It appears that every person who expresses an interest in the JBS receives the personalized attention of a paid field coordinator. In part, this says that the JBS is not overwhelmed with inquiries, a sign of trouble at the base which is reinforced by the fact that local activists are clearly in such short supply that anyone who expresses an interest is asked to be a leader. But it is also clear that the organization is alive and well and functioning from the top down. Any organization that can provide a personalized recruitment experience from a paid staff member for every potential recruit and that can run a summer camp has resources and, further, directs those resources toward nurturing activism, not just collecting dues for national projects.

The problem in the chapters is not due to a lack of organizational commitment to member involvement. Rather, it seems to be due to a serious error in Welch's organizational plan, an error the organization seems to have been unwilling or unable to detect and correct. Welch modelled the chapter structure on his understanding of the cellular structure of the Communist Party. Chapters are

limited to 30 members, and their membership is secret, so that members of different chapters do not know each other. All contact is hierarchical, through the field coordinators, not lateral. It appears that this structure in the Communist Party permitted intense levels of activity while protecting the identities of members, and Welch wanted to emulate this success. But he overlooked a central feature of the Communist Party, which is that it was an *activist* organization. Potential members had to be active to be permitted to join, and they were subject to strong sanctions if they stopped being active. Thirty *active* members makes for a very strong local organization. But the JBS does not require activism, it merely encourages it. Chapter rosters are made up of a very high proportion of "paper" members, and the upper limit on roster size means that very few chapters have more than a handful of active members.

This problem is exacerbated because the secrecy rule prevents interchapter cooperation. Evidence of the effect of secrecy was seen at one of the speeches. Two men who obviously knew each other from business connections outside of the JBS were seen greeting each other. Each was clearly very surprised to discover that the other was a JBS member. It was determined later that both were active members of their own chapters, but because of the secrecy rule, they had been prevented from cooperating in any joint JBS ventures. In many movement sectors, collective actions are undertaken by loose ad hoc coalitions of different organizations connected by informal linkages (see Gerlach and Hine 1970). This is prevented in the JBS.

NATIONAL VERSUS LOCAL ORGANIZATION: TENSIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS

We believe that the troubles in the JBS are an extreme case of tensions and contradictions that are widespread in movement organizations, especially in the United States. The problem of mobilizing a mass constituency to support national-level programs for social change is fundamentally different from the problem of mobilizing local groups to action. Individual motivations and incentives for supporting national movement organizations are different than those for participating in local action. These differences arise from intrinsic differences in the organizational problems at different levels, and they inevitably produce tensions and contradictions in the local chapters of national organizations. A few large movement organizations have charted a path that permits the organization to function at both levels, but finding such a path is difficult and depends somewhat on the organization's goals and ideology: It is not simply a matter of correct understanding or personal will.

It is widely understood that the incentives for participation in movement activities are *solidary* (deriving from interaction with others) and *purposive* (deriving from gratifying one's self-esteem), not *material*. (See Wilson 1973 for an explanation of this typology of incentives.) In examining the effects of

incentives, we need to consider the kind and magnitude of contribution being solicited (i.e., its cost), and the kinds and magnitudes of incentives which encourage people to make those contributions and bear those costs. Briefly, national organizations require different kinds of contributions with different incentive structures than do local activist organizations. We will discuss the two types of organizations in turn, and then show how these differences create troubles for chapters. At each step, we will talk about movement organizations in general (as we understand them from our unsystematically-observed experiences and from the literature) and about the JBS in particular.

National Organizations: Mobilizing Money and Paper Members

In the United States, national policy is largely determined on one edge of a continent that is 3,000 miles wide. It is physically impossible for the vast majority of Americans to participate actively in tactics focused on the national government. Most demonstrations in Washington are essentially local actions of local organizations in Washington or nearby cities. Massive demonstrations involving vast numbers of people coming long distances to Washington, or involving coordinated simultaneous protests in numerous locations around the country, are rare. Thus, most movement *participation* necessarily has a local organizational focus, and even the rare massive "national" protest is necessarily organized through local organizational structures.

But many movement organizations address goals and issues that are national in character, wholly or at least in part, such as nuclear weapons, legal rights for minorities or women, international Communism, taxes, and social welfare policy. National organizations attempt to influence Congressional legislation and administrative policies, or to publish "educational" materials which are distributed nationally. To do so, they require a national organizational presence. The national offices of such organizations conduct research, prepare reports and educational materials, conduct press conferences, and lobby. In the case of the JBS, the major national activity appears to be publishing books and magazines. These are the sorts of activities for which skill and experience matter, and they are most effectively accomplished by a committed staff of paid professionals and their paid assistants.

For national organizations performing such activities, the most important resource is money: money to pay the staff, money to publish educational materials and distribute them, money to pay for typewriters (or microcomputers) and supplies, money for office rent. As McCarthy and Zald (1973) stressed, there are many "national" organizations which rely on financial support from large individual, corporate, or foundation donors and which may have no genuine membership base of any kind.

However, there are other national organizations which rely heavily on small contributions solicited through the mail from "paper members." It is movement

organizations with large paper memberships which are our concern here. Such organizations *do* have a genuine mass base, but we need to investigate clearly just what its character is. The central offices of these "mass" national organizations are not democratically controlled from below. It is not that paper members have no control, but their control is indirect. Paper members vote with their checkbooks: An organization which has lost legitimacy loses money. But this "exit" option is their only source of power; paper members cannot directly influence the policy or strategy of a national organization.

The active members of organizations with strong active chapters may exert some control over the national organization's overall policies and strategies through national conventions and elections, although, even in these cases, the national office often functions autonomously, rather like a special kind of chapter.¹ It should be stressed that the claim that national offices of SMOs tend to be autonomous is *not* a claim that they "dominate" the chapters, since strong active local chapters tend also to be quite autonomous (see Carden 1978 and the discussion below). Rather, the two levels seem to operate almost independently of one another.

Paper Members and Symbolic Solidarity

There has been a fair amount of attention paid to the question of why professionalized movement organizations find it desirable to have paper members, but little to the question of why people would want to *be* paper members. Only by investigating such motivations can we understand the dynamics of such organizations. We take it as given that very few people find it intrinsically pleasant to write a check or give up money, so we rule out the possibility that people donate money simply to donate. Paper membership is inherently an isolated act and is thus incapable of providing solidary incentives. Apart from those organizations (such as Consumer's Union) whose "members" are really subscribers or customers, paper members receive no material benefits.

Thus, the motivation for making a financial contribution is clearly in the realm of purposive incentives. People give money to "causes" because it makes them feel good to do so. By writing a check, they vicariously experience the rewards of doing the right thing by paying someone else to do it. National causes are inherently distant and out of the reach of the individual who cannot personally argue a case before the Supreme Court, lobby in Congress, provide weapons to guerrillas, or defeat an international conspiracy. One cannot choose between contributing money and contributing time to a national organization: One contributes money or nothing at all. Although some people are active in local organizations and also contribute to national organizations, the rolls of national organizations are principally made up of those who have chosen to contribute money as a form of vicarious participation.

These contributions are "cheap." A donation typically represents a tiny portion of the contributor's income, an amount that is usually virtually unnoticeable and represents little, if any, sacrifice or opportunity cost. Although the thrill or satisfaction of vicarious participation may be small, it can easily exceed the cost of the donation, and the entire transaction could have quite minor importance in the person's life. These are the sorts of contributions that are especially vulnerable to volatile "market" and public relations cycles and events (McCarthy and Zald 1977).

There is another purposive incentive which can be of considerably greater importance to the contributor, a phenomenon that we may call "symbolic solidarity." The act of joining (i.e., paying dues to) certain movement organizations can satisfy a desire to affirm a self-identity as a movement member: One can be a card-carrying feminist by joining the National Organization for Women, a card-carrying socialist by joining the Democratic Socialists of America, or a card-carrying true American by joining the JBS.

For its members, joining the JBS is an important symbolic political act. Simply by joining the Society, a person asserts his or her radical right-wing politics and participates in notoriety. Its image as a secret extremist organization is so strong that the fact that one is a member can be stigmatizing in itself, leading a person to be treated as unstable or deviant. There is some true risk of material consequences if the secret is discovered by the wrong people, although the risk is probably great only for people who aspire to politics, government service, or university professorships.

With the rise of the New Right in America in the 1980s, one might expect the JBS to lose members to the new organizations. However, since the JBS does not demand much loyalty beyond paying dues, its members can still belong to other national SMOs on the New Right while not relinquishing their ties to the JBS. For example, the chapter leader was on almost every New Right mailing list in the country, and sent many other organizations money.² Since the JBS is still viewed as much more "radical" than the New Right organizations, members can retain their symbolic self-identity while also contributing to other organizations which accomplish more.

To summarize, most dues-paying members of large national organizations are motivated to make a low-cost contribution to a worthy cause in exchange for the purposive incentive of vicarious participation in activities they deem important. Additionally, they may be motivated to affirm their self-identity as "members" of a particular movement.

Local Organizations: Mobilizing Active Participation

Local organizations are very different.³ Direct participation is the currency of local mobilization. Even those local organizations whose principal goal is to raise money for a charitable or artistic purpose are dominated by members

who engage in activities to pursue that end. Local organizations need people who will actually *do* things, that is, people who will incur much higher costs than those involved in making a small financial contribution. Such activists are mobilized by purposive incentives supplemented by solidary incentives and the intrinsic pleasure of the activity. That is, they are most motivated by the prospect of feeling that they have personally accomplished some social good, and this motivation is supplemented by the attraction of the activity itself and the people one works with.

Carden (1978, p. 184) argues that ideological incentives are the predominant incentive for member participation in a social movement, but the purposive incentive of "the satisfaction of working for a just cause is of a different order from other selective incentives." She argues that when people are motivated by ideological or purposive incentives, it matters to them *what* they are accomplishing. Projects are not interchangeable, and different individuals will be motivated to work hard on different projects. One corollary of this argument is that decentralization is essential for mobilizing member participation. Carden argues that the decentralization of the women's movement in the 1970s accounted for its efflorescence. Even the National Organization for Women, which appears hierarchical on an organization chart, functions at the local level as issue-specific task forces chosen by members on the basis of personal interest.

It is also important to recognize that even the healthiest of local organizations rarely mobilize intense levels of participation from very large numbers of people across a long period of time. Healthy local organizations typically have a small number (less than 20, often less than 10) members who form the activist cadre and make large sustained contributions. These very active members do things with "decelerating" production functions (Oliver et al. 1985; Oliver 1984), that is, activities which can provide general benefits from the efforts of a few. They lobby, give speeches, write newsletters, distribute leaflets, counsel recruits, and so forth. They also create the conditions that permit others to make smaller contributions. For example, a task force leader may organize a project and plan a division of labor that permits others to participate meaningfully in contributing a few hours of their time. Solidary incentives and smaller purposive incentives can motivate "lesser participants" to attend meetings when enough of the background work is taken care of by the activist cadre. And, of course, the activist cadre may plan occasional "mass" events which draw in very large numbers of people for very short periods of time.

Thus, the key organizational problem for a local organization is the motivation of the activist cadre, those people who will make large contributions. Sustaining a local organization requires not only an aggregated pool of individuals with activist motivations, but a shared collective willingness to combine those motivations into an ongoing organization. All communities have local activists who devote a great deal of time and energy to local collective issues, but who work individually, pulling together ad hoc groups of supporters

for various projects, while making no sustained commitment to any organization. Instead, they are intensely motivated to accomplish each successive goal in whatever way they can. Many local organizations are formed around a small number of activists working on a particular problem, and begin to dissipate when the initial burst of activity has passed.

Organizational maintenance is always a problem for local organizations. Although people differ greatly in the kinds of activities they find satisfying, organizational maintenance activities are not on most people's lists. Activists view them as diversions from their goal orientations, and nonactivists simply find them boring. Treasurer's reports, minutes of past meetings, changes in by-laws, reports from committees, and discussions about how to increase attendance at meetings are all viewed as intrinsically unpleasant and worthless by most people. Activist organizations survive by constantly replacing old goals and projects with new ones, while minimizing organizational maintenance activities and concentrating them in the hands of those few members who are committed to preserving the organization.

To remain vital over time, a local organization requires a source of new recruits and a structure that provides purposive and solidary incentives by involving them in satisfying goal-oriented projects and creates satisfying personal ties within the organization. There are certainly many local organizations that have done this, but it is very difficult, and, most commonly, local organizations formed around specific issues turn into empty shells after the initial ranks are thinned by attrition, leaving behind a few survivors committed to maintaining the organization in memory of what it once was.

In short, the lifeblood of local movement organizations is active participation. The problems of maintaining and sustaining this participation are great and involve very different personal incentives and organizational dynamics from those that arise for national organizations.

The Problem of Chapters

Local chapters of national organizations are caught in the middle between the organizational imperatives of national and local organizations. National organizations encourage chapters as a way of providing a locus of participation for their members, and common membership in a national organization can provide a reason for activists to come together to form a local organization. Membership rolls, provided by the national office, give local activists the hope that there is a ready-made pool of potential recruits already committed to the cause, needing only notice of the times and places of meetings to pull them into a life of active participation.

The reality is usually very different. As we have argued, sustaining any local activist organization is difficult. Chapters of national organizations have one advantage, but they also have two special disadvantages. The advantage is,

of course, that the national organization answers the question "Why have an organization?" There is a built-in rationale for forming and sustaining an ongoing local organization that transcends any particular goal or project. This can be a real advantage for a local organization if the organization's ideology implies goals and projects which are likely to be shared by significant numbers of members. This advantage can be large, but so are the disadvantages faced by chapters.

The first disadvantage is that chapter members must be recruited from national members, or at least from those who are willing to become national members. But the incentives and motivations for national membership are different from, and almost incompatible with, those for local participation. The incentives for national membership are vicarious participation and symbolic solidarity. Paying national dues is attractive precisely because it is a low-cost *substitute* for active participation. Many of the members of national organizations *want* to be paper members, and they have participated as much as they want to (or feel they physically can) by writing a check. The roster of national members mailed to the chapter leader from the national office is a mirage. Anyone on that list who wants to be active almost certainly already is; even a national member who just moved to the area probably took the initiative to find the chapter instead of waiting for a call. Active chapter members can become unnecessarily self-critical and dispirited if they believe they ought to be able to turn those paper members into active members with the right program or the right recruitment strategy.

Chapters can and do recruit active members, but they do it the same way other local organizations do: They have projects and activities which attract people motivated by purposive incentives, and which create or strengthen the social ties that provide solidary incentives. Just as for any other local organization, new recruits are pulled in mostly from social network ties to existing chapter members. Ties to the national organization can give the chapter visibility which may promote inquiries from people who want to be active and feel themselves in sympathy with the known goals of the national organization, but these inquirers can be turned into recruits only if the chapter is viable as a local activist organization. In short, chapters can be successful local organizations only by essentially ignoring their apparent membership base of national members, and seeking to sustain themselves by persuading local people with activist tendencies to become members of the national organization.

In recruiting and maintaining an activist membership, chapters must overcome a second disadvantage. Their links to the national organization increase the burden of organizational maintenance activities. Chapter leaders receive directives and information from the national office which are supposed to be communicated to and discussed with members. Chapters are supposed to file reports with the national office on their activities, finances, and

membership and recruitment efforts. It is extremely difficult for any chapter to absorb this much organizational overhead and survive as a viable local activist organization. Meetings devoted to these activities will drive away goal-oriented activists and potential members who want to participate in small ways. Taken seriously, the requirements of the national office could absorb all the energies of a small activist cadre in a struggling chapter, leaving them no time for goal-oriented projects which might attract local recruits. Even those who are personally oriented to organizational maintenance become despairing when recruitment efforts fail and meeting attendance dwindles to a dispirited handful.

Money is another source of conflict. Activists with local orientations often view national dues as a worthless tax. Viable chapters often have intense debates about whether individuals must pay dues to the national organization, and about whether the local chapter should devote time and energy to fundraising activities to benefit the national. In the early 1970s, many chapters of the National Organization for Women had "local members" who paid no national dues, and there were heated debates within the organization about whether this was acceptable. This same debate was a major issue at a recent convention of the Nuclear Freeze Campaign and in the nuclear disarmament movement of the 1950s and 1960s (Robert Kleidman personal communication). The authors have participated in such debates in virtually every local chapter of a national organization they have ever been involved in. No such debates were observed in the local chapter of the JBS, which was not a viable local organization.

The local chapter of the JBS is an extreme case of the problems of chapters in national organizations. This SMO exacerbated the chapter problem by fragmenting its paper membership into "chapters" which were statistically unlikely to have more than a couple of potential activists. This was compounded by secrecy rules which prevent the few true activists, scattered across these chapters, from even being aware of each other's existence. It also appears that the national staff do not trust the members enough to let them act autonomously, judging by the accounts of former members, such as Schomp (1970), who says that most members were apathetic, and the activists were "kooks and zanies" who set off bombs, made insance threats to media personalities, or wrote strange letters to newspapers. The JBS seeks to be a respectable organization in an ideological field that attracts a lunatic fringe, and is ever vigilant to prevent the fringe from speaking for the organization. But, if Carden (1978) is right, decentralization and local autonomy are essential to provide incentives for activists. Finally, the conspiracy ideology itself does not seem to provide an obvious local referent for activism. This last point is less important than the others, however, since JBS members who want to be active do involve themselves in a variety of local single-issue campaigns.

Chapters of national organizations have problems with local mobilization, but these problems are not insoluble. Chapters are viable when they find a strategy for keeping the maintenance demands of the national organization within bounds, either by ignoring them or by isolating them in coordinating committee or business meetings which can be avoided by all but the committed few. Success is especially likely in those areas with large pools of potential activist members, so that maintenance activities can represent a very small part of the total person-hours available to the organization.

Based on Carden's (1978) work, Ferree and Hesse' account (1985), and our own more superficial impressions, the National Organization for Women appears to be a national organization which found a successful strategy for combining local activism and a strong national organization. The keys seem to be a loose ideology which tolerates diversity, organizational decentralization, and the task force model. Like the JBS, the National Organization for Women, at the national level, is supported by a very large base of paper members. The National Organization for Women has long been the largest and most visible feminist organization in the United States, and many women and men pay dues symbolically to express their feminism. Also like the JBS, its visibility provides it with a stream of new recruits who turn to it first when they become interested in feminism. But unlike the JBS, chapters have no maximum size, and are allowed to define their own geographic limits to take in a large enough pool of potential activists. Its task force structure fosters activism by allowing members to select the issue that is most worthwhile to them. Large chapters delegate organizational maintenance to a small committed cadre who meet separately as an executive committee, and devote their occasional chapter meetings to programs of general interest. Although it will doubtless collapse eventually, as all movement organizations do, the National Organization for Women has survived a number of bitter disputes in which major factions left the organization.

CONCLUSIONS

Movement organizations cannot be arrayed on any simple strong-weak dimension. Organizations may successfully mobilize monetary resources and have stable sources of funding that permit them to endure as entities and pursue social change goals for a very long time without ever being able to foster widespread mobilization of active participation. Conversely, organizations may succeed in mobilizing widespread active participation while failing to mobilize the resources necessary to achieve financial or organizational stability. But organizational stability and mass mobilization are not opposites, either: Some organizations achieve both, and many neither. They are simply distinct problems which require very different resolutions. Participation mobilization

is not a means to financial solvency, and financial resources contribute little to mobilization of action.

To influence policy at a national level, a movement almost requires a national-level organization to argue lawsuits, to formulate policy proposals or demands, to deal with the mass media, or to lobby with politicians for their support.⁴ It is physically impossible, at least in the United States, for these tasks to be performed by grass-roots volunteers, unless they happen to reside in Washington. Political realities almost "force" organizations addressing national issues into creating a professionalized staff to perform these tasks. In this circumstance, money is the key resource that needs to be mobilized. As McCarthy and Zald (1973) argue, many organizations obtain their money from foundations, corporations, or wealthy individuals and never even try to create any sort of mass base.

But many national organizations with professional staff mobilize money year after year by collecting dues and contributions from a loyal base of small "grass-roots" contributors. McCarthy and Zald aptly called these people "paper members," because they do not actively participate in the national organization's activities. However, they imply that this is one (increasingly popular) alternative, that it is somehow possible to have nonpaper, that is "real," members at the national level. Our thesis is that, at the national level, virtually *all* members are "paper," that is, unable directly to influence or participate in the organization's choice of strategy and tactics.

There are "real" members of movement organizations, members who participate at the "grass-roots," that is, outside the national office. But their activities are tied to local organizations. They may sometimes work locally to organize local protests timed to coincide with other local protests, all coordinated through the national organization, or to arrange for local people to travel together to a major protest in Washington. Most often they work autonomously on projects which address the larger concerns of the movement organization in some local context. They may direct protest at some visible local embodiment of the movement's "enemy," seek passage of relevant legislation at the municipal or state level or, perhaps, work to educate the local population about the national issue.

In most American movement organizations, the national organization has virtually no control over local activities. National staff and officers make suggestions and seek to persuade local members to pursue certain activities rather than others, but they have absolutely no way to compel obedience.⁵ The only sanction they may have available is expulsion for violating the organization's principles, and this merely protects the organization's identity without effectively altering local behavior. Local activism (and, by implication, virtually all grass-roots activism) is locally generated and locally controlled. Although the national organization may provide the initial idea or spark, local mobilization is built on local social networks invoking locally-available

incentives for participation. If the local base is lacking, there can be no active grass-roots mobilization.

In short, the nationals cannot exert much control over the locals, and the locals cannot exert much control over the nationals, beyond choosing among contestants in an election or passing general policy resolutions. National mobilization of money cannot create local mobilization of activism, and widespread local mobilization cannot ensure a stable financial base for a national organization. The organizational dynamics and the incentives for individual contributors or participants are entirely different. National organizations, if they wish to operate in the national policy environment, cannot rely solely on active members for financial support because there are too few of them (and they are not likely to be particularly wealthy). Thus they rely on external support or paper members, and develop a power base outside their active membership. To be viable, local organizations must *do* something, they must engage in activities that are meaningful to the members or meet the members' needs for social interaction. The simple existence of a prosperous and successful national organization does not fulfill this need for local social networks and a local base of action.

There are national organizations without local branches or chapters, and local organizations which are independent of any national organization. Such organizations can proceed "naturally" to resolve their organizational needs. But those organizations which combine both levels, which seek to join national policy-influencing activities with genuine active participation in local chapters, suffer conflicts and contradictions. The fundraising, paperwork, and appeals for expressions of support for national legislation which support the national organization can hinder the development of meaningful local projects which are central to the motivations of local activists. The goal-specific or project-specific orientations which tend to motivate local activists lead them to give low priority to supporting the distant activities of the national organization.

In the JBS, we see an organization in which a dominant and successful national office blocks the conditions which could give rise to viable active local branches. In other movement organizations, we find other specific patterns of relation between the national and local levels, some producing strong nationals and weak locals, some producing strong activist locals but weak underfunded nationals, some producing strong mobilization on both levels, and some producing deadlock and failure. In movements, as a whole, we often see a kind of division of labor between professionalized national organizations with no active membership and decentralized local mobilizations with no centralized national presence. We believe that identifying the different ways in which the local and national levels of a movement or movement organizations relate to each other, and the ways in which these relations affect movement trajectories and outcomes, will greatly further our overall understanding of the dynamics of social movements.

NOTES

1. National movement organizations which also have strong activist chapters may have substantive elections which actually affect the organization's national policy and strategy, for example of the widely-publicized campaigns for the presidency of the National Organization for Women (see Ferree and Hess 1985 for a brief overview). Such events are rare. It would be interesting to see a study of whether the election results affected behavior in the national office.

2. The chapter leader said he remained loyal to the JBS for two reasons. First, the all-encompassing ideology of the JBS helped to integrate the messages of all other groups into a coherent and more simple whole. Second, the JBS emphasis on local chapters made him feel more a part of an organization than a name on a mailing list. We suspect that even for this active member, "symbolic solidarity" was also important.

3. In this section, we are not distinguishing independent local organizations from chapters of national organizations. Rather, we believe that there are important dynamics involved in local mobilization that are common to both types of groups.

4. This is not to deny that unorganized mass protest or rebellion can produce policy changes, but, in this case, those in power devised policy strategies to deal with the crisis without directly consulting the protestors for their policy inputs.

5. This statement is true for ordinary volunteer movement organizations whose members can, and do, freely quit whenever they want to. There are, of course, a small number of coercive cult-like organizations which do compel obedience through physical threats and psychological intimidation. The dynamics of such coercive organizations are entirely outside the scope of the arguments advanced in this paper. These arguments also do not apply to organizations which successfully operate under "democratic centralism" or other hierarchical principles in which members become so committed to the organization that they bind themselves to follow the directives of the national organization whether they agree with them or not. Such organizations are rare and attract few members, at least in the United States.

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