WHO GOVERNS?

Democracy and Power in an American City

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1. The Nature of the Problem

In a political system where nearly every adult may vote but where knowledge, wealth, social position, access to officials, and other resources are unequally distributed, who actually governs?

The question has been asked, I imagine, wherever popular government has developed and intelligent citizens have reached the stage of critical self-consciousness concerning their society. It must have been put many times in Athens even before it was posed by Plato and Aristotle.

The question is peculiarly relevant to the United States and to Americans. In the first place, Americans espouse democratic beliefs with a fervency and a unanimity that have been a regular source of astonishment to foreign observers from Tocqueville and Bryce to Myrdal and Brogan. Not long ago, two American political scientists reported that 96 per cent or more of several hundred registered voters interviewed in two widely separated American cities agreed that: "Democracy is the best form of government" and "Every citizen should have an equal chance to influence government policy," and subscribed to other propositions equally basic to the democratic credo.[1] What, if anything, do these beliefs actually mean in the face of extensive inequalities in the resources different citizens can use to influence one another?

These beliefs in democracy and equality first gained wide acceptance as a part of what Myrdal later called the "American Creed" during a period when the problem of inequality was (if we can disregard for the moment the question of slavery) much less important than it is today. Indeed, the problem uppermost in the minds of the men at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787 could probably have been stated quite the other way around. To men concerned with what was then a unique task of adapting republican institutions to a whole nation, the very *equality* in resources of power that American society and geography tended to generate seemed to endanger political stability and liberty. In a society of equals, what checks would there be against an impetuous, unenlightened, or unscrupulous majority? A half century later, this was also the way an amazing and gifted observer, Alexis de Tocqueville,

1. James W. Prothro and Charles M. Grigg, "Fundamental Principles of Democracy: Bases of Agreement and Disagreement," *Journal of Politics*, 22 (1960), 276–94.

posed the question in probably the most profound analysis of American democracy ever written. For Tocqueville, the United States was the most advanced representative of a new species of society emerging from centuries of development: "In running over the pages of [European] history, we shall scarcely find a single great event of the last seven hundred years that has not promoted equality of condition." So he wrote in the introduction to the first volume of his *Democracy in America.*

> Whither, then, are we tending? [he went on to ask] No one can say, for terms of comparison already fail us. There is greater equality of condition in Christian countries at the present day than there has been at any previous time, in any part of the world, so that the magnitude of what already has been done prevents us from foreseeing what is yet to be accomplished.

In the United States he had looked upon the future, on

> one country in the world where the great social revolution that I am speaking of seems to have nearly reached its natural limits . . . Men are there seen on a greater equality in point of fortune and intellect, or, in other words, more equal in their strength, than in any other country of the world, or in any age of which history has preserved the remembrance.[2]

The America that Tocqueville saw, however, was the America of Andrew Jackson. It was an agrarian democracy, remarkably close to the ideal often articulated by Jefferson.

Commerce, finance, and industry erupted into this agrarian society in a gigantic explosion. By the time the century approached its last decade, and another distinguished foreign observer looked upon the United States, the America of Tocqueville had already passed away. In how many senses of the word, James Bryce asked in 1899, does equality exist in the United States?

> Clearly not as regards material conditions. Sixty years ago there were no great fortunes in America, few large fortunes, no poverty. Now there is some poverty (though only in a few places can it be called pauperism), many large fortunes, and a greater number of gigantic fortunes than in any other country of the world.

He found also an intellectual elite, among whose members the "level of exceptional attainment . . . rises faster than does the general level of the multitude, so that in this regard also it appears that equality has diminished and will diminish further."

2. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York, Vintage Books, 1955), *1*, 5, 6, 14, 55.

It was true that in America there were no formal marks of rank in the European sense. However, this did not

> prevent the existence of grades and distinctions in society which, though they may find no tangible expression, are sometimes as sharply drawn as in Europe . . . The nature of a man's occupation, his education, his manners and breeding, his income, his connections, all come into view in determining whether he is in this narrow sense of the word "a gentleman."

Yet, remarkably, the universal belief in equality that Tocqueville had found sixty years earlier still persisted. "It is in this," Bryce wrote, "that the real sense of equality comes out. In America men hold others to be at bottom exactly like themselves." A man may be enormously rich, or a great orator, or a great soldier or writer, "but it is not a reason for bowing down to him, or addressing him in deferential terms, or treating him as if he was porcelain and yourself only earthenware."[3]

Now it has always been held that if equality of power among citizens is possible at all—a point on which many political philosophers have had grave doubts—then surely considerable equality of social conditions is a necessary prerequisite. But if, even in America, with its universal creed of democracy and equality, there are great inequalities in the conditions of different citizens, must there not also be great inequalities in the capacities of different citizens to influence the decisions of their various governments? And if, because they are unequal in other conditions, citizens of a democracy are unequal in power to control their government, then who in fact does govern? How does a "democratic" system work amid inequality of resources? These are the questions I want to explore by examining one urban American community, New Haven, Connecticut.

I have said "explore" because it is obvious that one cannot do more by concentrating on one community. However, New Haven embodies most of the equalities and inequalities that lend this enterprise its significance. In the course of the book, I shall examine various aspects of these that may be related to differences in the extent to which citizens can and do influence local government. But it will not hurt to start putting a little paint on the canvas now.

One might argue whether the political system of New Haven is "democratic" or "truly democratic," but only because these terms are always debatable. In everyday language, New Haven is a democratic political community. Most of its adult residents are legally entitled to vote. A relatively high proportion do vote. Their votes are, by and large, honestly counted—though absentee votes, a small fraction of the total,

3. James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth* (London, Macmillan, 1889), 2, 602–03, 606–07.

are occasionally manipulated. Elections are free from violence and, for all practical purposes, free from fraud. Two political parties contest elections, offer rival slates of candidates, and thus present the voters with at least some outward show of choice.

Running counter to this legal equality of citizens in the voting booth, however, is an unequal distribution of the resources that can be used for influencing the choices of voters and, between elections, of officials. Take property, for example. In 1957, the fifty largest property owners, in number less than one-sixteenth of one per cent of the taxpayers, held nearly one-third of the total assessed value of all real property in the city. Most of the fifty largest property owners were, of course, corporations: public utilities like the United Illuminating Company, which had the largest assessment ($22 million) and the Southern New England Telephone Company ($12 million); big industries like Olin Mathieson ($21 million) which had bought up the Winchester Repeating Arms Company, the famous old New Haven firearms firm; family-held firms like Sargent and A. C. Gilbert; or department stores like the century-old firm of Malley's. Of the fifty largest property owners, sixteen were manufacturing firms, nine were retail and wholesale businesses, six were privately-owned public utilities, and five were banks. Yale University was one of the biggest property owners, though it ranked only tenth in assessed value ($3.6 million) because much of its property was tax-free. A few individuals stood out boldly on the list, like John Day Jackson, the owner and publisher of New Haven's two newspapers.

Or consider family income. In 1949, the average (median) family income in New Haven was about $2,700 a year. One family out of forty had an income of $10,000 or more; over one family out of five had an income of less than $1,000. In the Thirtieth Ward, which had the highest average family income, one family out of four had an income of $7,000 or more; in the Fifth, the poorest, over half the families had incomes of less than $2,000 a year. (Technically, the First Ward was even poorer than the Fifth for half the families there had incomes of less than $700 a year, but three-quarters of the residents of the First were students at Yale.)

The average adult in New Haven had completed the ninth grade, but in the Tenth Ward half the adults had never gone beyond elementary school. About one out of six adults in the city had gone to college. The extremes were represented by the Thirty-first Ward, where nearly half had attended college, and the Twenty-seventh, where the proportion was only one out of thirty.[4]

4. Assessments are from the city records. The average ratio of assessed value to actual prices on property sold in 1957 was 49.2, according to the New Haven Taxpayers Research Council, "Assessment of Real Estate," *Council Comment*, No. 36 (Mar. 9, 1959). Data on incomes and education are from a special tabulation by wards of the data in *U.S. Census, Characteristics of the Population, 1950*. Income data are estimates by the Census Bureau from a 20% sample.

Thus one is forced back once more to the initial question. Given the existence of inequalities like these, who actually governs in a democracy?

Since the question is not new, one may wonder whether we do not, after all, pretty well know the answer by now. Do we not at least know what answer must be given for the present-day political system of the United States? Unfortunately no. Students of politics have provided a number of conflicting explanations for the way in which democracies can be expected to operate in the midst of inequalities in political resources. Some answers are a good deal more optimistic than others. For example, it is sometimes said that political parties provide competition for public office and thereby guarantee a relatively high degree of popular control. By appealing to the voters, parties organize the unorganized, give power to the powerless, present voters with alternative candidates and programs, and insure that during campaigns they have an opportunity to learn about the merits of these alternatives. Furthermore, after the election is over, the victorious party, which now represents the preferences of a majority of voters, takes over the task of governing. The voter, therefore, does not need to participate actively in government; it is enough for him to participate in elections by the simple act of voting. By his vote he registers a preference for the general direction in which government policy should move; he cannot and does not need to choose particular policies. One answer to the question, "Who governs?" is then that competing political parties govern, but they do so with the consent of voters secured by competitive elections.

However, no sooner had observers begun to discover the extraordinary importance of political parties in the operation of democratic political systems than others promptly reduced the political party to little more than a collection of "interest groups," or sets of individuals with some values, purposes, and demands in common. If the parties were the political molecules, the interest groups were the atoms. And everything could be explained simply by studying the atoms. Neither people nor parties but interest groups, it was said, are the true units of the political system. An individual, it was argued, is politically rather helpless, but a group unites the resources of individuals into an effective force. Thus some theorists would answer our question by replying that interest groups govern; most of the actions of government can be explained, they would say, simply as the result of struggles among groups of individuals with differing interests and varying resources of influence.

The first explanation was developed by English and American writers, the second almost entirely by Americans. A third theory, much more

pessimistic than the other two, was almost exclusively European in origin, though it subsequently achieved a considerable vogue in the United States. This explanation, which has both a "Left" and a "Right" interpretation, asserts that beneath the façade of democratic politics a social and economic elite will usually be found actually running things. Robert and Helen Lynd used this explanation in their famous two books on "Middletown" (Muncie, Indiana), and many studies since then have also adopted it, most notably Floyd Hunter in his analysis of the "power structure" of Atlanta.[5] Because it fits nicely with the very factors that give rise to our question, the view that a social and economic elite controls government is highly persuasive. Concentration of power in the hands of an elite is a necessary consequence, in this view, of the enormous inequalities in the distribution of resources of influence—property, income, social status, knowledge, publicity, focal position, and all the rest.

One difficulty with all of these explanations was that they left very little room for the politician. He was usually regarded merely as an agent—of majority will, the political parties, interest groups, or the elite. He had no independent influence. But an older view that could be traced back to Machiavelli's famous work, *The Prince*, stressed the enormous political potential of the cunning, resourceful, masterful leader. In this view, majorities, parties, interest groups, elites, even political systems are all to some extent pliable; a leader who knows how to use his resources to the maximum is not so much the agent of others as others are his agents. Although a gifted political entrepreneur might not exist in every political system, wherever he appeared he would make himself felt.

Still another view commingled elements of all the rest. This explanation was set out by Tocqueville as a possible course of degeneration in all democratic orders, restated by the Spanish philosopher, Ortega y Gassett, in his highly influential book, *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930), and proposed by a number of European intellectuals, after the destruction of the German Republic by Nazism, as an explanation for the origins of modern dictatorships. Although it is a theory proposed mainly by Europeans about European conditions, it is so plausible an alternative that we cannot afford to ignore it. Essentially, this theory (which has many variants) argues that under certain conditions of development (chiefly industrialization and urbanization) older, stratified, class-based social structures are weakened or destroyed; and in their place arises a

5. Robert S. Lynd and Helen M. Lynd, *Middletown* (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1929) and *Middletown in Transition* (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1937). Floyd Hunter, *Community Power Structure* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1953) and *Top Leadership, U.S.A.* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1959).

mass of individuals with no secure place in the social system, rootless, aimless, lacking strong social ties, ready and indeed eager to attach themselves to any political entrepreneur who will cater to their tastes and desires. Led by unscrupulous and exploitative leaders, these rootless masses have the capacity to destroy whatever stands in their way without the ability to replace it with a stable alternative. Consequently the greater their influence on politics, the more helpless they become; the more they destroy, the more they depend upon strong leaders to create some kind of social, economic, and political organization to replace the old. If we ask, "Who governs?" the answer is not the mass nor its leaders but both together; the leaders cater to mass tastes and in return use the strength provided by the loyalty and obedience of the masses to weaken and perhaps even to annihilate all opposition to their rule.

A superficial familiarity with New Haven (or for that matter with almost any modern American city) would permit one to argue persuasively that each of these theories really explains the inner workings of the city's political life. However, a careful consideration of the points at which the theories diverge suggests that the broad question, "Who governs?" might be profitably subdivided into a number of more specific questions. These questions, listed below, have guided the study of New Haven recorded in this book:

Are inequalities in resources of influence "cumulative" or "noncumulative?" That is, are people who are better off in one resource also better off in others? In other words, does the way in which political resources are distributed encourage oligarchy or pluralism?

How are important political decisions actually made?

What kinds of people have the greatest influence on decisions? Are different kinds of decisions all made by the same people? From what strata of the community are the most influential people, the leaders, drawn?

Do leaders tend to cohere in their policies and form a sort of ruling group, or do they tend to divide, conflict, and bargain? Is the pattern of leadership, in short, oligarchical or pluralistic?

What is the relative importance of the most widely distributed political resource—the right to vote? Do leaders respond generally to the interests of the few citizens with the greatest wealth and highest status—or do they respond to the many with the largest number of votes? To what extent do various citizens *use* their political resources? Are there important differences that in turn result in differences in influence?

Are the patterns of influence durable or changing? For example, was democracy stronger in New Haven when Tocqueville contemplated the American scene? And in more recent years, as New Haven has grappled

with a gigantic program of urban reconstruction, what has happened to popular control and to patterns of leadership? In general, what are the sources of change and stability in the political system?

Finally, how important is the nearly universal adherence to the "American Creed" of democracy and equality? Is the operation of the political system affected in any way by what ordinary citizens believe or profess to believe about democracy? If so, how?

The answers to these questions which seem best to fit the facts of New Haven will gradually unfold in the chapters that follow. I warn the reader, however, that I shall not attempt to dispose of all these questions in any one place. Each chapter tells only a part of the story; thus I shall not deal directly with the last pair of questions until the final chapter. Since each chapter builds upon those that precede it, the analysis in the final chapters presupposes knowledge of all that has gone before.

EQUALITY AND INEQUALITY IN NEW HAVEN

Book I

FROM OLIGARCHY TO PLURALISM

8. *Overview:* The Ambiguity of Leadership

One of the difficulties that confronts anyone who attempts to answer the question, "Who rules in a pluralist democracy?" is the ambiguous relationship of leaders to citizens.

Viewed from one position, leaders are enormously influential—so influential that if they are seen only in this perspective they might well be considered a kind of ruling elite. Viewed from another position, however, many influential leaders seem to be captives of their constituents. Like the blind men with the elephant, different analysts have meticulously examined different aspects of the body politic and arrived at radically different conclusions. To some, a pluralistic democracy with dispersed inequalities is all head and no body; to others it is all body and no head.

Ambiguity in the relations of leaders and constituents is generated by several closely connected obstacles both to observation and to clear conceptualization. To begin with, the American creed of democracy and equality prescribes many forms and procedures from which the actual practices of leaders diverge. Consequently, to gain legitimacy for their actions leaders frequently surround their covert behavior with democratic rituals. These rituals not only serve to disguise reality and thus to complicate the task of observation and analysis, but—more important—in complex ways the very existence of democratic rituals, norms, and requirements of legitimacy based on a widely shared creed actually influences the behavior of both leaders and constituents even when democratic norms are violated. Thus the distinction between the rituals of power and the realities of power is frequently obscure.

Two additional factors help to account for this obscurity. First, among all the persons who influence a decision, some do so more directly than others in the sense that they are closer to the stage where concrete alternatives are initiated or vetoed in an explicit and immediate way. Indirect influence might be very great but comparatively difficult to observe and weigh. Yet to ignore indirect influence in analysis of the distribution of influence would be to exclude what might well prove to be a highly significant process of control in a pluralistic democracy.

Second, the relationship between leaders and citizens in a pluralistic democracy is frequently reciprocal: leaders influence the decisions of constituents, but the decisions of leaders are also determined in part by

what they think are, will be, or have been the preferences of their constituents. Ordinarily it is much easier to observe and describe the distribution of influence in a political system where the flow of influence is strongly in one direction (an asymmetrical or unilateral system, as it is sometimes called) than in a system marked by strong reciprocal relations. In a political system with competitive elections, such as New Haven's, it is not unreasonable to expect that relationships between leaders and constituents would normally be reciprocal.

One who sets out to observe, analyze, and describe the distribution of influence in a pluralistic democracy will therefore encounter formidable problems. It will, I believe, simplify the task of understanding New Haven if I now spell out some of the theory and assumptions that guided our study of the distribution of influence.

The Political Stratum

In New Haven, as in other political systems, a small stratum of individuals is much more highly involved in political thought, discussion, and action than the rest of the population. These citizens constitute the political stratum.

Members of this stratum live in a political subculture that is partly but not wholly shared by the great majority of citizens. Just as artists and intellectuals are the principal bearers of the artistic, literary, and scientific skills of a society, so the members of the political stratum are the main bearers of political skills. If intellectuals were to vanish overnight, a society would be reduced to artistic, literary, and scientific poverty. If the political stratum were destroyed, the previous political institutions of the society would temporarily stop functioning. In both cases, the speed with which the loss could be overcome would depend on the extent to which the elementary knowledge and basic attitudes of the elite had been diffused. In an open society with widespread education and training in civic attitudes, many citizens hitherto in the apolitical strata could doubtless step into roles that had been filled by members of the political stratum. However, sharp discontinuities and important changes in the operation of the political system almost certainly would occur.

In New Haven, as in the United States, and indeed perhaps in all pluralistic democracies, differences in the subcultures of the political and the apolitical strata are marked, particularly at the extremes. In the political stratum, politics is highly salient; among the apolitical strata, it is remote. In the political stratum, individuals tend to be rather calculating in their choice of strategies; members of the political stratum are, in a sense, relatively rational political beings. In the apolitical strata, people are notably less calculating; their political choices are more strongly influenced by inertia, habit, unexamined loyalties, personal attachments,

emotions, transient impulses. In the political stratum, an individual's political beliefs tend to fall into patterns that have a relatively high degree of coherence and internal consistency; in the apolitical strata, political orientations are disorganized, disconnected, and unideological. In the political stratum, information about politics and the issues of the day is extensive; the apolitical strata are poorly informed. Individuals in the political stratum tend to participate rather actively in politics; in the apolitical strata citizens rarely go beyond voting and many do not even vote. Individuals in the political stratum exert a good deal of steady, direct, and active influence on government policy; in fact some individuals have a quite extraordinary amount of influence. Individuals in the apolitical strata, on the other hand, have much less direct or active influence on policies.

Communication within the political stratum tends to be rapid and extensive. Members of the stratum read many of the same newspapers and magazines; in New Haven, for example, they are likely to read the *New York Times* or the *Herald Tribune*, and *Time* or *Newsweek*. Much information also passes by word of mouth. The political strata of different communities and regions are linked in a national network of communications. Even in small towns, one or two members of the local political stratum usually are in touch with members of a state organization, and certain members of the political stratum of a state or any large city maintain relations with members of organizations in other states and cities, or with national figures. Moreover, many channels of communication not designed specifically for political purposes—trade associations, professional associations, and labor organizations, for example—serve as a part of the network of the political stratum.

In many pluralistic systems, however, the political stratum is far from being a closed or static group. In the United States the political stratum does not constitute a homogeneous class with well-defined class interests. In New Haven, in fact, the political stratum is easily penetrated by anyone whose interests and concerns attract him to the distinctive political culture of the stratum. It is easily penetrated because (among other reasons) elections and competitive parties give politicians a powerful motive for expanding their coalitions and increasing their electoral followings.

In an open pluralistic system, where movement into the political stratum is easy, the stratum embodies many of the most widely shared values and goals in the society. If popular values are strongly pragmatic, then the political stratum is likely to be pragmatic; if popular values prescribe reverence toward the past, then the political stratum probably shares that reverence; if popular values are oriented toward material gain and personal advancement, then the political stratum probably reflects these values; if popular values are particularly favorable to political,

social, or economic equality, then the political stratum is likely to emphasize equality. The apolitical strata can be said to "govern" as much through the sharing of common values and goals with members of the political stratum as by other means. However, if it were not for elections and competitive parties, this sharing would—other things remaining the same—rapidly decline.

Not only is the political stratum in New Haven not a closed group, but its "members" are far from united in their orientations and strategies. There are many lines of cleavage. The most apparent and probably the most durable are symbolized by affiliations with different political parties. Political parties are rival coalitions of leaders and subleaders drawn from the members of the political stratum. Leaders in a party coalition seek to win elections, capture the chief elective offices of government, and insure that government officials will legalize and enforce policies on which the coalition leaders can agree.

In any given period of time, various issues are salient within the political stratum. Indeed, a political issue can hardly be said to exist unless and until it commands the attention of a significant segment of the political stratum. Out of all the manifold possibilities, members of the political stratum seize upon some issues as important or profitable; these then become the subject of attention within the political stratum. To be sure, all the members of the political stratum may not initially agree that a particular issue is worthy of attention. But whenever a sizable minority of the legitimate elements in the political stratum is determined to bring some question to the fore, the chances are high that the rest of the political stratum will soon begin to pay attention.

Although political issues are sometimes generated by individuals in the apolitical strata who begin to articulate demands for government action, this occurs only rarely. Citizens in the apolitical strata are usually aware of problems or difficulties in their own circle; through word of mouth or the mass media they may become aware of problems faced by people in other circles. But to be aware of a problem is by no means equivalent to perceiving a political solution or even formulating a political demand. These acts are ordinarily performed only by members of the political stratum. Within the political stratum, issues and alternatives are often formulated by intellectuals, experts, and reformers, whose views then attract the support of professionals. This is how questions as abstract and difficult as the proper rate of growth in the Gross National Product are injected into national politics; and, as we shall see, this is roughly the route by which urban redevelopment came into the politics of New Haven.

However, in gaining attention for issues, members of the political stratum operate under constraints set by party politicians with an eye on the next election. Despite the stereotype, party politicians are not

necessarily concerned *only* with winning elections, for the man who is a party politician in one role may, in another, be a member of a particular interest group, social stratum, neighborhood, race, ethnic group, occupation, or profession. In this role he may himself help to generate issues. However, simply qua party politician, he not only has a powerful incentive to search for politically profitable issues, but he has an equally strong motive for staying clear of issues he thinks will not produce a net gain in his votes in the next election.

Because of the ease with which the political stratum can be penetrated, whenever dissatisfaction builds up in some segment of the electorate party politicians will probably learn of the discontent and calculate whether it might be converted into a political issue with an electoral payoff. If a party politician sees no payoff, his interest is likely to be small; if he foresees an adverse effect, he will avoid the issue if he can. As a result, there is usually some conflict in the political stratum between intellectuals, experts, and others who formulate issues, and the party politicians themselves, for the first group often demands attention to issues in which the politicians see no profit and possibly even electoral damage.

The independence, penetrability, and heterogeneity of the various segments of the political stratum all but guarantee that any dissatisfied group will find spokesmen in the political stratum, but to have a spokesman does not insure that the group's problems will be solved by political action. Politicians may not see how they can gain by taking a position on an issue; action by government may seem to be wholly inappropriate; policies intended to cope with dissatisfaction may be blocked; solutions may be improperly designed; indeed, politicians may even find it politically profitable to maintain a shaky coalition by keeping tension and discontent alive and deflecting attention to irrelevant "solutions" or alternative issues.

In his search for profitable issues, the party politician needs to estimate the probable effects various actions he might take will have on the future votes of his constituents. Although he is generally unaware of it, he necessarily operates with theory, a set of hypotheses as to the factors that influence the decisions of various categories of voters and the rough weights to assign to these factors.

The subculture of the political stratum provides him with the relevant categories—businessmen, Italians, wage earners, and the like. It also furnishes him with information as to the voting tendencies of these groups, e.g., their predisposition to vote Democratic or Republican. Given a category and its voting tendency, the party politician typically operates on the simple but sound assumption that human responses can be influenced by rewards and deprivations, both past and prospective. His task then is to choose a course of action that will either reinforce the voting tendency of categories predisposed in favor of him or his party, or

weaken the voting tendency of categories predisposed to vote against him or his party. This he does by actions that provide individuals in these categories with rewards or the expectation of rewards.

Some Political Axioms

Most of the people in the political stratum at any given moment take for granted a number of assumptions so commonplace in the political culture of the time and so little subject to dispute that they function as "self-evident" axioms. The axioms include both factual and normative postulates. In New Haven, the most relevant current axioms among the political stratum would appear to be the following:

1. To build an effective political coalition, rewards must be conferred on (or at least promised to) individuals, groups, and various categories of citizens.

2. In devising strategies for building coalitions and allocating rewards, one must take into account a large number of different categories of citizens. It would be dangerous to formulate strategies on the assumption that most or all citizens can be divided into two or three categories, for a successful political coalition necessarily rests upon a multiplicity of groups and categories. (In the early decades of the century a minority in the political stratum, leaders of the Social Democratic and Socialist Labor parties, pursued a strategy that reflected a confident belief in the existence of a bipolar socioeconomic structure in which political beliefs and actions were almost wholly determined by working-class or white-collar ways of making a living. But because this strategy failed to win elections, it has never been widely approved in the political stratum, least of all among the party politicians in the two major parties.)

3. Although a variety of attributes are relevant to political strategy, many different attributes can either be subsumed under or are sometimes overridden by ethnic, racial, and religious affiliations.

4. In allocating rewards to individuals and groups, the existing socioeconomic structure must be taken as given, except for minor details. (The local political stratum has not been strongly reformist, certainly not on social and economic matters. Except perhaps for socialists, local reform movements have concentrated on defects in the political system, not the socioeconomic structure of the society. And except for a few men who dreamed and spoke of changing the face of the city, until recently the political stratum has assumed that the physical and economic features of the city are determined by forces beyond their control.)

5. Although a certain amount of legal chicanery is tolerable, legality and constitutionality are highly prized. The pursuit of illegal practices on a sizable scale is difficult to conceal; illegal actions by public officials ordinarily lead, when known, to loss of public office; unconstitutional

action is almost certain to become entangled in a complex network of judicial processes. The use of violence as a political weapon must be avoided; if it were used it would probably arouse widespread alarm and hostility.

6. The American creed of democracy and equality must always be given vigorous and vociferous support. No one who denies the validity of this creed has much chance of winning political office or otherwise gaining influence on the local scene. Among other things, the creed assumes that democracy is the best form of government, public officials must be chosen by majority vote, and people in the minority must have the right to seek majority support for their beliefs.[1]

7. In practice, of course, universalistic propositions in the American creed need to be qualified. Adherence to the creed as a general goal and a set of criteria for a good government and a good society does not mean that the creed is, or as a practical matter can be, fully applied in practice. (Some elements in the political stratum are deeply disturbed by the gap between ideal and reality. Most people in the political stratum, however, are probably either unaware of any sharp conflict between ideal and reality, or are indifferent to it, or take the gap for granted in much the same spirit that they accept the fact that religious behavior falls short of religious belief.)

Leaders and Subleaders

In any durable association of more than a handful of individuals, typically a relatively small proportion of the people exercises relatively great direct influence over all the important choices bearing on the life of the association—its survival, for example, or its share in such community resources as wealth, power, and esteem, or the way these resources are shared within the association, or changes in the structure, activities, and dominant goals of the association, and so on. These persons are, by definition, the leaders. It is the leaders in New Haven whom the following chapters seek to identify and describe.

The goals and motives that animate leaders are evidently as varied as the dreams of men. They include greater income, wealth, economic security, power, social standing, fame, respect, affection, love, knowledge, curiosity, fun, the pleasure of exercising skill, delight in winning, esthetic satisfaction, morality, salvation, heroism, self-sacrifice, envy, jealousy, revenge, hate—whatever the whole wide range may be. Popular beliefs and folklore to the contrary, there is no convincing evidence at present

1. On the extent of belief in this creed in two cities (Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Tallahassee, Florida) see James W. Prothro and Charles M. Grigg, "Fundamental Principles of Democracy: Bases of Agreement and Disagreement," *Journal of Politics*, 22 (1960), 276–94. See also Ch. 28 below.

that any single common denominator of motives can be singled out in leaders of associations. We are not compelled, therefore, to accept the simple view that Moses, Jesus, Caligula, Savanarola, St. Ignatius, Abraham Lincoln, Boss Tweed, Mahatma Ghandi, Carrie Chapman Catt, Huey Long, and Joseph Stalin all acted from essentially the same motives.

To achieve their goals, leaders develop plans of action, or strategies. But actions take place in a universe of change and uncertainty; goals themselves emerge, take shape, and shift with new experiences. Hence a choice among strategies is necessarily based more on hunch, guesswork, impulse, and the assessment of imponderables than on scientific predictions. Adopting a strategy is a little bit like deciding how to look for a fuse box in a strange house on a dark night after all the lights have blown.

Ordinarily the goals and strategies of leaders require services from other individuals. (Both Christ and Lenin needed disciples to increase and rally their followers.) To perform these services more or less regularly, reliably, and skillfully, auxiliaries or subleaders are needed. The tasks of subleaders include aid in formulating strategies and policies; carrying out the dull, routine, time-consuming or highly specialized work of the eternal spear bearers, the doorbell ringers, the file clerks; recruiting and mobilizing the following; and, in a country like the United States where there exists a strong democratic ethos, helping by their very existence to furnish legitimacy to the actions of the leaders by providing a democratic façade.

To secure the services of subleaders, leaders must reward them in some fashion. Here too the range of rewards seems to be as broad as the spectrum of human motives. However, some kinds of rewards are easier to manipulate than others. In business organizations, the rewards are mainly financial ones, which are probably the easiest of all to manipulate. In many other kinds of associations—and evidently to some extent even in business—either financial rewards are too low to attract and hold subleaders capable of performing the tasks at the minimum levels required by the leaders, or within a certain range other kinds of rewards are more important to the auxiliaries than financial ones. Leaders may therefore contrive to pay off their auxiliaries with nonfinancial rewards like social standing, prestige, fun, conviviality, the hope of salvation, and so on.

Thus the survival of an association of leaders and subleaders depends on frequent transactions between the two groups in which the leaders pay off the subleaders in return for their services. To pay off the subleaders, leaders usually have to draw on resources available only outside the association. Sometimes leaders can obtain these resources from outside by coercion, particularly if they happen to control the single most effective institution for coercion: the government. This is one reason—but by no means the only one—why government is always such an important pawn in struggles among leaders. Ordinarily, however, the association must

produce something that will appeal to outsiders, who then contribute resources that serve, directly or indirectly, to maintain the association. Probably the most important direct contribution of these outsiders—let us call them constituents—is money; their most important indirect contribution is votes, which can be converted into office and thus into various other resources.

In some associations, subleaders themselves may be put to work on tasks that produce a surplus available, directly or indirectly, for allocation by the leaders. Political party leaders in New Haven, for example, appoint as many of their subleaders as they can to municipal jobs. The income from these jobs is a payoff to the subleaders for their party work. Subleaders in city jobs are in turn assessed at election time for campaign contributions; these contributions provide a "surplus" that may be spent to pay off subleaders who don't have city jobs.

Because every person's time is to some extent limited, every activity competes with every other. Therefore it is not enough for leaders merely to provide *some* rewards for subleaders; they must furnish rewards big enough to attract subleaders they want from other associations or from individual, family, friendly, neighborly pastimes like watching television, mowing the lawn, taking the family to the beach, playing cards, drinking beer in a tavern, reading the newspapers, and so on.

In a rough way, associations can be classified as either vocational or avocational. In vocational associations the subleaders have full-time jobs for which they are paid; in avocational associations they do not. To the extent that an association can produce services for which others will pay, as in the case of a business organization, auxiliaries can be given full-time employment. But many associations cannot or do not sell their services for money because to do so would be inconsistent with the leaders' goals or the loyalty of auxiliaries and followings. (The sale of indulgences, for example, helped generate the Reformation that split Protestantism from the Roman Catholic Church.) If an association also lacks other means of securing a large income, such as levying assessments on followings, it must necessarily remain avocational. Because it cannot lure subleaders away from other activities by paying them adequately, an avocational association often resorts to other kinds of rewards, such as prestige, social status, and conviviality.

Policies

To achieve their own goals, secure the services of subleaders, and obtain outside support from constituents, leaders usually find it a useful strategy to commit themselves (or appear to commit themselves) to certain choices they will make under some specified conditions. These commitments represent their policies—or at any rate their *promises* as to

policy. For many reasons, not the least being the general uncertainty and constant flux of events, leaders frequently do not live up to their promises. But their proposed or actual policies often contain a direct or indirect, actual or expected payoff *of some kind* to subleaders and constituents. The attempt to satisfy the preferences of both subleaders and constituents by policies is one of the commonest sources of conflict that leaders of political associations encounter.

Despite some general theories of considerable persuasiveness, the precise reasons why an individual prefers one alternative to another are not so well understood that any general and comprehensive explanation for all preferences can be offered with confidence. (Part of the uncertainty arises because of persistent doubts that a white rat in a maze is exactly equivalent to a human being in a quandary.) Whatever the reasons may be, individuals do have preferences on matters of policy. Sometimes these preferences are extraordinarily strong, sometimes weak. Sometimes one's preferences can be explained by one's hopes that a policy will produce concrete benefits to oneself or to the people nearest one's center of life. In other cases (though I take it as axiomatic that any policy one approves of is expected to be rewarding in *some* sense) the benefits may be general or, if specific, may be conferred on individuals remote from oneself. I do not mean to suggest that what would ordinarily be called altruism plays anything like a dominant role in politics, but it would be misleading to exclude it altogether. Not everyone ceases to be interested in good public schools when his own children grow up; advocates of public housing usually turn out to be middle-class people who have no need for it themselves; individuals have pressed for compulsory smallpox vaccination even though they and their families were already immunized; dentists have generally supported the fluoridation of public water supplies. One could multiply the examples.

Policies are an important means, though not the only means, by which leaders attract the support they need from constituents. In fact, policies sometimes win over constituents who then identify themselves with the association more or less permanently and can be regularly counted on to support the association even when some of its leaders and policies change. These constituents make up the *following* of the association.

The policies that leaders promise to constituents and followings—I shall call them *overt* policies—are not always identical to, or indeed even consistent with, the covert commitments they make to their subleaders. From the point of view of a leader concerned with the task of building his following, it would be ideal if his subleaders were indifferent to his overt policies, for this would give him freedom to develop overt policies exclusively adapted to the desires of constituents and followings. But this kind of complete independence from the desired subleaders is

almost impossible for a leader to attain. It could exist only where the flow of rewards for which subleaders gave their services did not depend at all on the overt policies of leaders. For example, such a situation might exist where a group of subleaders needed an excuse to justify the convivial activities generated by their service in the association and therefore happily contributed their services without regard to any policies of the leaders simply in order to maintain the camaraderie they experienced in the association.

By providing jobs, certain kinds of vocational associations may also come close to liberating the overt policies of leaders from the demands of subleaders, particularly if the role of the subleader as it is defined in the culture is confined simply to doing his job and receiving his wage or salary without caring about or having a right to participate in the shaping of the overt policies of the association. In business organizations, rank-and-file employees are usually assumed to have only slight interest in the overt policies of the business other than those touching on their own wages, hours, and working conditions.

However, political associations, at least in the United States and certainly in New Haven, are more nearly avocational than vocational. (For the leaders, to be sure, they are often vocational—although, paradoxically, the virtues of amateurism are so highly regarded that leaders whose major occupation and source of income is politics often try to disguise the fact in order to avoid the epithet "professional politician.") Political associations, unlike business firms, do not produce services or commodities that can be openly sold for a price. Indeed the laws of the state of Connecticut as of other states flatly prohibit transactions of this kind. In New Haven, the amount of income legally or illegally secured by an association engaged in politics is tiny compared with that of a business firm with an equivalent number of full-time and part-time workers. Nor are nonfinancial rewards easily obtainable. The esteem among persons of high social standing that political officials seem to have enjoyed in New Haven in the nineteenth century has probably declined. Even the amount of influence open to a subleader is usually slight. (One minor subleader encountered in New Haven in the course of our study displayed his influence by "fixing" parking tickets for his friends. On investigation, it turned out that he fixed the tickets by paying the fines out of his own pocket.)

Despite the avocational character of political associations in New Haven, two processes help to reduce conflicts between the overt and covert policies of political leaders and to produce a loyal corps of subleaders who, while concerned with covert policies, are often indifferent to overt policies.

First, a prerequisite to success for both the overt and covert policies

of political leaders ordinarily is to win elections and thereby attain the rights and powers of office. Office is necessary if jobs, contracts, and other favors are to be dispensed to subleaders; office is also necessary if overt policies are to be executed. Hence subleaders are motivated to win elections and to support whatever overt policies are needed to win, as long as these do not threaten covert postelection commitments.

Secondly, even if a subleader is initially attracted into an association because of the overt policies of the leaders, participation generates new rewards. Because an association provides opportunities for conviviality, it can come to fill a normal human need for friendliness, comradeship, respect, and social intercourse. And a subleader who participates in an association may strengthen his identification with it so that it becomes an extension of his own personality; the victories and defeats of the association are then equivalent to victories and defeats for the subleader himself.

These two processes, however, do not always eliminate conflict between the overt and covert policies of political leaders. Conflict is likely to arise, for example, whenever large elements of the political stratum are developing stricter standards of political morality. In particular, if the middle- and upper-class segments of the political stratum increase in size, then demands for extending civil service requirements, professionalism, public review, fixed procedures, and neutrality are likely to become more widespread and more insistent. Bureaucratization and middle-class influence in local politics are likely to go together. Conflicts may also arise if overt policies with seemingly great popularity among constituents require structural changes in the organization of government that would make it more difficult to honor traditional kinds of covert policies. In New Haven, as we shall see, an attempt to reform the city charter produced just such a conflict.

In these and many other similar cases, political leaders face a painful dilemma, for they must either fight the "organization" or lose the support of some of their constituents and perhaps even hitherto reliable followings. Either choice may involve electoral defeat and possibly the end of a political career.

Democracy, Leadership, and Minority Control

It is easy to see why observers have often pessimistically concluded that the internal dynamics of political associations create forces alien to popular control and hence to democratic institutions. Yet the characteristics I have described are not necessarily dysfunctional to a pluralistic democracy in which there exists a considerable measure of popular control over the policies of leaders, for minority control by leaders within

associations is not necessarily inconsistent with popular control over leaders through electoral processes.

For example, suppose that (1) a leader of a political association feels a strong incentive for winning an election; (2) his constituents comprise most of the adult population of the community; (3) nearly all of his constituents are expected to vote; (4) voters cast their ballot without receiving covert rewards or punishments as a direct consequence of the way they vote; (5) voters give heavy weight to the overt policies of a candidate in making their decision as to how they will vote; (6) there are rival candidates offering alternative policies; and (7) voters have a good deal of information about the policies of the candidates. In these circumstances, it is almost certain that leaders of political associations would tend to choose overt policies they believed most likely to win the support of a majority of adults in the community. Even if the policies of political associations were usually controlled by a tiny minority of leaders in each association, the policies of the leaders who won elections to the chief elective offices in local government would tend to reflect the preferences of the populace. I do not mean to suggest that any political system actually fulfills all these conditions, but to the extent that it does the leaders who directly control the decisions of political associations are themselves influenced in their own choices of policies by their assumptions as to what the voting populace wants.

Although this is an elementary point, it is critical to an understanding of the chapters that follow. We shall discover that in each of a number of key sectors of public policy, a few persons have great *direct* influence on the choices that are made; most citizens, by contrast, seem to have rather little direct influence. Yet it would be unwise to underestimate the extent to which voters may exert *indirect* influence on the decisions of leaders by means of elections.

In a political system where key offices are won by elections, where legality and constitutionality are highly valued in the political culture, and where nearly everyone in the political stratum publicly adheres to a doctrine of democracy, it is likely that the political culture, the prevailing attitudes of the political stratum, and the operation of the political system itself will be shaped by the role of elections. Leaders who in one context are enormously influential and even rather free from demands by their constituents may reveal themselves in another context to be involved in tireless efforts to adapt their policies to what they think their constituents want.

To be sure, in a pluralistic system with dispersed inequalities, the direct influence of leaders on policies extends well beyond the norms implied in the classical models of democracy developed by political philosophers.

But if the leaders lead, they are also led. Thus the relations between leaders, subleaders, and constituents produce in the distribution of influence a stubborn and pervasive ambiguity that permeates the entire political system.

Some Hypotheses

Given these assumptions, one might reasonably expect to find in the political system of New Haven that the distribution of influence over important decisions requiring the formal assent of local governmental officials is consistent with the following hypotheses:

First, only a small proportion of the citizens will have much *direct* influence on decisions in the sense of directly initiating proposals for policies subsequently adopted or successfully vetoing the proposals of others.

Second, the leaders—i.e., citizens with relatively great direct influence—will have a corps of auxiliaries or subleaders to help them with their tasks.

Third, because a democratic creed is widely subscribed to throughout the political stratum, and indeed throughout the population, the public or overt relationships of influence between leaders and subleaders will often be clothed in the rituals and ceremonies of "democratic" control, according to which the leaders are only the spokesmen or agents of the subleaders, who are "representatives" of a broader constituency.

Fourth, because of the need to win elections in order to hold key elective offices, leaders will attempt to develop followings of loyal supporters among their constituents.

Fifth, because the loyalty and support of subleaders, followings, and other constituents are maintained by memories of past rewards or the expectation of future rewards, leaders will shape their policies in an attempt to insure a flow of rewards to all those elements whose support is needed. Consequently, in some circumstances, subleaders, followings, and other constituents will have significant *indirect* influence on the decisions of leaders. The existence of this indirect influence is an important source of ambiguity in understanding and interpreting the actions of leaders in a pluralistic system.

Finally, conflicts will probably occur from time to time between leaders' overt policies, which are designed to win support from constituents, and their covert policies, which are shaped to win the support of subleaders or other leaders. The keener the political competition, the more likely it is that leaders will resolve these conflicts in favor of their overt commitments.

To determine whether these propositions actually fit the political system of New Haven, I now propose to turn to three "issue-areas" where

it is possible to examine decisions to see what processes of influence are at work. Decisions in two of these areas, public education and urban redevelopment, require the formal assent of local government officials at many points. The third, the process of making nominations in the two major parties for local elective offices, is only quasi-governmental, but I have chosen it on the assumption that whoever controls nominations might be presumed to occupy a critical role in any effort to gain the assent of local officials.