HANDBOOK
of
PARTY POLITICS

Edited by
RICHARD S. KATZ
AND
WILLIAM CROTTY

SAGE Publications
London • Thousand Oaks • New Delhi
PROFESSIONAL STAFF IN POLITICAL PARTIES

Paul Webb and Robin Kolodny

INTRODUCTION

One of the most under-researched fields in the study of political parties is that of party employees. This is curious given how much we now know about most other significant aspects of party life, including developments in party ideology and policy; the role, powers and social background of party members and leaders; the recruitment and sociology of legislators and candidates; and the marketing of parties. By contrast, relatively little is known of the men and women on the organizational payroll who run the day-to-day operations of parties up and down the countries in which they operate. This is a significant oversight, which leaves us with a deficient understanding of an important aspect of party organizational development.

While it surely goes without saying that party staff have always been of general importance to the operation and functioning of party organizations, it seems likely that their importance is greater now than ever before. In part this is because it is clear that the modern age of election campaigning and political marketing makes certain types of professional expertise all the more pertinent. Indeed, even in the context of parliamentary democracies, where politics is generally less candidate-centred than under presidentialism, there is nothing particularly novel in the argument that election campaigning in the televisual era relies far more on centralized professional resourcing than on local party activism (see, for instance, McKenzie, 1955: 591; Butler and Rose, 1960). In addition (and relatedly), it is likely that parties have come to rely increasingly on paid professionals in the context of the now ample evidence of party membership decline and 'de-energization' around the democratic world (Katz et al., 1992; Mair and van Biezen, 2001; Seyd and Whiteley, 1992; Whiteley et al., 1994). As the voluntary wings of party organizations have gone into decline, so the resources available through paid professionals have increased. Here, we explore the implications of these changes for political parties. First, we define our subject by exploring the scope and range of party political work, identifying in particular the professional elements within it. Next, we offer a detailed definition of 'professionalism' in this context, before proceeding to a review of the literature on party work at the levels of central and subnational organizations, political consultancy and governmental bodies. Finally, we reflect on the implications for future research.

UNDERSTANDING PARTY PROFESSIONALS: THE RANGE AND SCOPE OF THEIR WORK

In essence, we are engaged in an examination of scholarship on those who work for political parties. What do we mean by 'work' in this context? Perhaps the main function of major political parties across the contemporary democracies is to run election campaigns. While this function might once have been restricted to relatively short periods of time during and immediately before an election, today it is clear that election campaigns are run continuously. Whether a polity has fixed
elections or not, the political party must constantly monitor public opinion and modify either its issue positions or presentation of such positions accordingly. In addition, officeholders understand that the positions they take or actions they engage in today may have enormous effects at the next election. Therefore, they appreciate the need for continuous campaigning by the parties and the professional staff employed to assist in forming and articulating partisan positions.

In effect, then, for all such parties, the work of their employees will often be bound up with the electoral imperative. The tasks connected with this function include the following:

- the recruitment and nomination of candidates for election;
- research into policy issues and opponents;
- the development of policy;
- the raising of funds to fight elections;
- the publicizing and marketing of party policies and issue positions;
- the gauging of public opinion;
- the mobilization of voter support.

In addition to staff employed in connection with electoral functions, we should note that parties employ staff to perform a variety of tasks associated with the day-to-day running of the organization — accountants and financial staff, human resources and personnel, press officers, membership officers, organizers and agents. Overall, those who conduct this range of duties and functions can be broken down into:

- amateurs (volunteers and party members);
- professional staff on the regular party payroll;
- professional consultants on limited-term contracts or fees.

While there has been a resurgence of interest in the numbers and roles of 'amateur' activists in recent years (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992; Whiteley et al., 1994; Scarrow, 1996; Widfeldt, 1999; Carty and Blake, 2001; Mair and van Biezen, 2001), our horizons in this chapter are limited to the contribution of the latter two categories, the paid professionals of party politics.

For our purposes, professionals work in the political process full-time (as their primary employment) and are paid for their work. They can be divided into two categories: staff and consultants. Staff are obviously on the payroll of the political parties. However, as Katz and Mair (1992) have argued, the state frequently employs individuals who perform important work for political parties. For example, the full-time staff of members of legislative bodies and political staff of executives can often be considered in support of the political party of that member. Monroe (2001) makes this case for the staff working in the constituency offices of partisan electoral officials as well. Therefore, both party organizations and states pay the salaries of professional staff members. Consultants, on the other hand, are independent contractors for the party. They work primarily in the political realm (see Farrell et al., 2001, for a typology), but are not technically employees of the parties.

Recent work by Kolodny and Dulio (2003) suggests that when political party organizations make conscious decisions to hire professional consultants in lieu of hiring and training professional staff, then the consultants ought to be viewed as the equivalent of employees. Therefore, our review of the literature on party workers (below) will explore three categories in turn: professional staff on the party payroll; professional political consultants; and professional staff paid by the state but engaged in essentially party political work. Before reviewing this literature, however, it is important first to develop a clearer understanding of precisely what 'professionalism' might mean in the context of party political work.

**DEFINING PROFESSIONALISM IN PARTY WORK**

Political scientists tend to use the term 'professional' in the context of party politics without giving much consideration to its proper definition. There is no need for this since there is a well-developed sociological literature on the concept. This literature recognizes a continuum of professionalism on which groups can be located according to the number of professional characteristics which they exhibit (Rompel and Utter, 1997). A review of some of the key items in this literature (Wilensky, 1959; Brante, 1990; Raelin, 1991) suggests that the characteristics most usually emphasized include the following:

- Expertise. At the heart of the notion of professionalism lies the notion of some special competence which sets the professional apart from other workers. This will most probably reflect a particular education and perhaps formal vocational training or qualification. In the USA, certificate and degree programmes in campaign management are proliferating rapidly; training today's corps of party officials, campaign managers, and
political consultants. These programmes are emerging in response to a need for more specially trained individuals to handle the technical tasks required by contemporary campaigning (Jalonic, 2002/03).

Autonomy. In view of the professional's expertise, s/he tends to be entrusted with an unusual degree of job autonomy; though answerable to the 'client', the professional's specialist knowledge means that s/he cannot be dictated to by line managers. To some extent this distinguishes a professional from a mere 'bureaucrat', who is a general functionary under the supervision of a manager.

Mobility. Angelo Panebianco (1988: 227) points out that, by virtue of their expertise and autonomy, professionals are usually in a good position to sell their labour on the external job market if they so choose. Traditional party bureaucrats, however, will typically be engaged in work such that it would be difficult for them to find an equivalent job in the external market; this relative non-transferability of their skills helps explain the bureaucrat's subordination to line managers and political leaders. An illustration of the growing potential for mobility across sectors is provided by the USA, where the boundaries between party employment, full-time consultancy and governmental/staff positions are becoming blurred (Thurber and Nelson, 2000; Johnson, 2001). Whether this development is part of a gathering cross-national trend can only be revealed by new empirical research.

Self-regulation. Given his or her specialist knowledge, only the professional is in a position to protect clients against entry into the job market of charlatans or incompetents. Hence, a profession will typically have the right to establish and police its own code of vocational ethics. For instance, the political consultancy industry in the USA has begun to make such an effort in this direction by establishing the American Association of Political Consultants. An entire volume dedicated to ethics in campaigns highlights the development of ethical standards and the almost complete inability to police them due to the permeability of the profession (Nelson et al., 2002).

Commitment. Although an archetypal professional may enjoy a considerable degree of job autonomy, s/he will be expected to display a special level of devotion to the tasks undertaken.

These key characteristics provide us with an ideal-type of professionalism. In previous work, one of the authors defined a professional as 'a member of the workforce with a relatively high status and strong position in the labour market flowing from a special degree of expertise, commitment, autonomy and capacity for self-regulation, which in turn reflects a particular education and formal training' (Webb and Fisher, 2003). By implication, 'professionalization' refers to an institutional process by which professionals become more central to an organization (in our case, a political party organization). By contrast, traditional party bureaucrats will have less status, expertise, job autonomy or capacity to regulate their own activities, and are less likely to have been through a special formal education. Given that their status and rewards will usually be lower, moreover, they are less likely to be expected to demonstrate a special devotion to duty. This calls to mind work conducted more than three decades ago by Kornberg and colleagues on party workers in North America, where they described the prevalence of an amateur ethos, lack of career prospects, low prestige and pay, poor commitment and a lack of any professional reference group among party workers; this syndrome would seem poles apart from our notion of a political professional (Kornberg et al., 1970).

Notwithstanding the foregoing discussion, it is notable how often people use terms such as 'professionalism' and 'professionalization' in a rather less rigorous sense than we have adumbrated here. More colloquial usage seems to imply that professionalization can consist simply of an enhanced degree of workplace effectiveness flowing from a greater sense of commitment or devotion to work-related duties among employees. This may well go hand in hand with the introduction of new working procedures designed to facilitate greater effectiveness. This 'soft' notion of professionalization contains some elements from our pure ideal-type (commitment and effectiveness), but lacks the classic elements of specialist training, expertise, autonomy and self-regulation. A rare study of professionalism among staff in a contemporary central party office reveals that, while professionalization in the classic ideal-typical sense has partial relevance, professionalization in the soft sense seems to have become far more diffuse throughout the party apparatus (Webb and Fisher, 2003).

It should be noted that, in respect of most parliamentary democracies, there are obvious limits to the professionalization of party
employees in terms of the specialist ideal-type. There is a major institutional and systemic constraint at work which helps explain why there are likely to be far fewer autonomous, self-regulating professionals working for parties in these countries than in the USA. In America, the candidate-centred nature of politics is such that an extensive profession of political consultancy has emerged which conforms closely to the ideal-type; in most parliamentary democracies political life remains more party-centred, notwithstanding the encroachment of personal politics, and there is unlikely to be the same scope for such a large autonomous body of political professionals. Thus, although congressional candidates in the USA are assisted by their parties, they are largely free to direct their own election campaigns; in doing so, they hire professional consultants. By contrast, there is far less sense of separate personal campaigns being fought in each constituency in most parliamentary systems, as the major parties coordinate national electioneering efforts to a greater extent. That is, campaigns are more genuinely party campaigns. Such an approach requires the professional services of relatively few consultants at the centre, and this limited demand cannot sustain a large professional corps of independent, self-certifying and self-regulating political consultants.

The point is missed that there is no scope for professionals, however, and indeed, we have seen them becoming far more important in certain spheres of party work for some years now, most obviously in respect of opinion pollsters, advertising consultants and related fields of political marketing and media presentation, but also in newer fields such as fundraising (Webb and Fisher, 2003). Even so, only a minority of party employees could be deemed 'professional', unless we accept a less demanding definition of the term. A more flexible yet still meaningful definition of 'professionalism' might suggest that, in a party context, a professional is someone who has been educated to degree level, and/or has a formal vocational qualification, and who has achieved relevant specialization through on-the-job experience and training. This places primary emphasis on the elements of expertise, though it says little directly of factors such as autonomy, commitment and mobility (though these things are likely to be frequent corollaries of expertise). This approach would certainly result in the impression of far more widespread professionalization of parties.

Note, too, that professionalization is a process which can be directly facilitated by the party itself to some extent. That is, an organization intent on developing a professional body of personnel can take responsibility for effecting this by engaging with programmes of staff development and training. Such activities might include paying for staff to take courses and qualifications provided externally (for instance, in accountancy) or the direct in-house provision of training in relevant skills; for example, the party might provide training for local organizers or agents, on activities such as canvassing, getting out the vote, call-handling, dealing with local party finances, and so on. Indeed, there is a lengthy tradition of this kind of specialist professional recruitment and development in some parties (Frasure and Kornberg, 1975; Braggins, 1999; Webb and Fisher, 2003).

In summary, we may surmise that detailed comparative empirical study of party employees is unlikely to find that professionalization now suffices every aspect of most parties' working practices: not all employees will display each of the core characteristics of the ideal-type professional - expertise, job autonomy, commitment, vocational identification, a code of professional ethics and membership of a professional body which regulates its members. Nevertheless, it is plausible to suppose that a more flexibly defined notion of professionalism applies widely. That is, where training, expertise and conviction are held as important, we might reasonably suppose that we have identified 'professionals in pursuit of political outcomes' (Romzek and Utter, 1997: 1263).

If so, then the dominant perception of contemporary political science in this respect - that 'professionalization' is a relatively narrowly defined process which flows from the growing reliance on external communications and marketing professionals - will have to be revised in favour of the view that professionalization is somewhat more diffuse than this, embracing many within parties' regular bureaucracies. This then raises questions as to how far such a development has been deliberately engineered by party managers, and what factors might have motivated such a development. To what extent would it reflect deliberate strategic choice, and to what extent would it flow inevitably from broader trends in education and employment in advanced industrial societies? Moreover, what are the implications for political parties? To be 'more professional' may be positive from the point of bureaucratic rationality, but does it carry any implications for the purposive or ideological complexion of the party? Typically, professionalism is associated with the recruitment of people with special skill; such indivi
duals' career goals: Farrell et al (1980) the growth of European professional parties is predicated on the idea that professional politicians should be the nucleus of a new breed of 'professional' party mental attitudinal change. We may hypothesize that the rise of this new professional political culture over the years has led to the professionalization of parties in Western Europe.

Party professionals and political culture

Now that we have seen what 'prof of party politics' means in the literature, we can turn to a more detailed examination of what it means in practice. The traditional image of the party professional is that of a highly trained professional, who is employed by the party in a full-time capacity and who is expected to work for the party in the same way as a civil servant. However, this is not always the case, and party professionals can also be part-time workers, or even volunteers. In addition, party professionals are not always employed by the party in the same way as civil servants. For example, they may be employed by an organization that is not affiliated to a political party, but that provides services to the party. This means that party professionals can be influenced by a variety of factors, including the political culture of the party, the personal preferences of the professional, and the requirements of the organization that employs them. Overall, the role of party professionals is complex and multifaceted, and it is important to consider these factors when examining the impact of professionalism on political parties.
special skills on a ‘meritorocratic’ basis. But are such individuals driven more by self-interested career goals than by ideological commitment? Farrell et al. (2001: 22) have recently described the growing prevalence within Western European party organizations of a ‘revolving door philosophy’ toward their staff: ‘specialists are employed for particular services, and once the task is complete the employee is (and should be) dispensable’. Given the mobility of professionals and the possibility that electoralist party organizations adopt a highly instrumental attitude towards some of them, it would hardly be surprising to discover that they were motivated less by ideological conviction than by personal professional goals. Little research has been done on this to date, though there have been some rare exceptions over the years (Wright, 1967; Fisher and Webb, 2003).

**THE LITERATURE ON PARTY EMPLOYEES**

**Party employees and the mass party**

Now that we have established a clear sense of what ‘professionalism’ consists of in the context of party politics, we are in a position to survey the literature, such as it is. The role of paid party officials first received attention in the literature on political parties in the era in which European political systems were democratized (the late 19th and early 20th centuries). Perhaps the best-known example is provided by Robert Michels’ celebrated study of the ‘oligarchical tendencies’ of mass parties. His frequently rehearsed argument proposed that salaried party officials constituted ‘expert leaders’ with specialist technical training in the business of running and organizing a political party. It is by very necessity that a simple employee becomes a “leader”, acquiring a freedom of action that he ought not to possess. The chief then becomes accustomed to dispatch important business on his own responsibility, and to decide various questions relating to the life of the party without making any attempt to consult the rank and file. It is obvious that democratic control thus undergoes a progressive diminution, and is ultimately reduced to an infinitesimal minimum’ (Michels, 2001: 27).

Through a comparative study of various socialist parties (especially the German Social Democrats), he demonstrated his argument that these party professionals held a place of great importance within the organization.

An innovatory feature of the mass party, when it first emerged, was that it constituted an authentically national organization. That is, while the classic cadre party was essentially a loose alliance of parliamentarians, each with his own power base in a particular locale, the mass party consisted of a multiplicity of local branches of an integrated national structure. This ‘socialist invention’ (Duverger, 1954) spawned imitators on the political right, which had to adapt by developing new forms of local and national organization. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that party scholars during this period sometimes adopted a local focus, studying the development of local branches and of the role that paid officials played within them.

Studies of the early stages of national and local party organization in the era of democratization are as likely to be the work of historians as of political scientists. Certainly this is true in respect of work on the role of famous 19th-century local party officials in Britain such as J.R. Bonham of the Conservatives or Joseph Parks of the Liberals (Cass, 1953; Jennings, 1961). The structure and life of local party organizations, and the role of officials within them, were subsequently described and analysed in a number of studies (Michie, 1955; Rose, 1963, 1974; Bealey et al., 1965; Leonard, 1965; Butler and Pinto-Duschinsky, 1970; Pinto-Duschinsky, 1972; Wilson, 1973; Frasure and Kornberg, 1974, 1975). The core questions addressed by these studies concerned the social background, functions, training and effectiveness of party officials. In North America, equivalent research, in structurally quite different organizational settings, focused on similar themes, including the recruitment patterns, socialization, training and participation of party officials (Bowman and Boynton, 1966a, 1966b; Ippolito and Bowman, 1969; Kornberg et al., 1969, 1970, 1973, 1979). Essentially the same questions, plus the ideological orientations of officials, feature in studies of continental European parties (Wright, 1967; Sani, 1972). It also should be noted that the apparatchiks of Europe’s (former) communist parties have often attracted analysis (Marijnens, 1996; Harasymiw, 1996).

**Party personnel and the party of electoral contestation**

We have remarked how Duverger referred to the mass party as a ‘socialist invention’. Social democratic and labour parties were founded primarily as agents of social integration and
group representation for the newly enfranchised masses during the era in which Western European politics was democratized. During this time they devised and pursued ideological programmes which were driven by social group interests, and they sought to capture the loyal political support of these groups, perhaps even to ‘encapsulate’ them in a network of interconnected social, economic and political organizations (Wellhofer, 1979). But for 40 years now, commentators have been describing the transformation of Western political parties away from the classic mass party model into something inherently less concerned with the functions of mass integration or the articulation of specific social group interests. Since Otto Kirchheimer (1966) major parties have generally been regarded as motivated primarily by vote-winning and office-seeking goals, a change which requires, inter alia, the downgrading of narrow group ties and softening of class ideologies in favour of broadly aggregative programmatic appeals. This conception of party change lies at the heart of Kirchheimer’s own model of the ‘catch-all’ party, but is equally central to later conceptions which have added further layers of analysis, such as Angelo Panebianco’s ‘electoral-professional’ party (1988), and Katz and Mair’s ‘cartel party’ (1995). As a form of shorthand, we refer to all of these ideal-types under the banner of ‘parties of electoral contestation’, or simply ‘electoralists’ parties’.

The single most notable feature of the literature on the paid professional party is that it has focused overwhelmingly on the role of professional consultants with specialist technical expertise. Primarily, this expertise lies in the field of political marketing and communication – opinion polling, public relations, advertising, journalism and film-making. The closest heuristic ideal-type is the ‘electoral-professional party’ – an organization primarily motivated by electoral rather than ideological or expressive imperatives and characterized, inter alia, by the pre-eminence of the leadership and the centrality of professionals within the party organization (Panebianco, 1988: 284).

However, while the importance of certain kinds of professional consultants such as pollsters, advertisers and marketing experts has often been empirically demonstrated (Hughes and Wintour, 1990; Bowler and Farrell, 1992; Webb, 1992; Sammel, 1995; Kavanagh, 1995; Swanson and Mantan, 1996; Farrell and Webb, 2000; Medric, 2001; Herronson, 2000; Farrell et al., 2001; Less-Manshuny, 2001), the notion of ‘professionalization’ has rarely if ever been considered to extend beyond this in the context of contemporary party politics. This points us to an issue which has been overlooked in the literature on party employees. While there is an emerging literature on professionals and consultants who parties hire to help them in the business of marketing, campaigning and communication (see Dulio, Chapter 28, this volume), there is a need for wider research on other kinds of party staff. Specifically, political scientists need to engage with questions such as: how ‘professional’ are party employees, and in what senses are they professional? Are professionals different from other types of paid staff in terms of their social and political profiles and motivations? If so, what does this imply for professional parties? What roles do the professionals play within parties? What issues of accountability and regulation do they give rise to? These issues should be added to the pre-existing concerns of political scientists working in the area (on the recruitment, socialization, training and activities of paid employees), all of which retain their intellectual validity in the contemporary context.

Having established a sense of the broad historical development of research on party professionals, it is useful to reflect on the literature in terms of more specific analysis. Specifically, what are the features of the work which has been conducted on the three categories of party political professional whom we earlier identified?

**Payroll professionals within party organizations**

Perhaps the most prominent theme of research on payroll party professionals has been its quantitative focus. Thus, Farrell and Webb (2000: 117) have reviewed data on trends in paid staffing across nine Western European countries to show that the majority experienced increasing numbers of paid staff between 1960 and 1990, especially in their central offices and parliamentary organizations. However, at the subnational level things were rather different; only a minority of parties showed net growth across time, and some (notably the main British parties) experienced quite dramatic local staff wastage. Staffing trends in the US context are considerably more erratic, especially at the national level (Cotter and Bibby, 1983; Herronson, 1988; Goldman, 1990; Kolodny, 1998). With fixed election times, staffing levels tend to be high during election years and low during ‘off years’. However, there is some evidence of a trend at the subnational level: levels of staffing in both election years and ‘off’ years are on the rise, though admittedly there have been few party staffing and recruitment contracts than paid employees.

The growing role of professional staff is evident in the example of the Liberal Democrats, where party employee turnover is one of the highest in the UK (2000: 2003). As the party employs 20% of its members, whereas the average for all parties is 50%. The party’s high turnover ratio is one of the highest in the UK (2000: 2003). As the party employs 20% of its members, whereas the average for all parties is 50%. The party’s high turnover ratio is one of the highest in the UK.

This, then, see the centrality of paid party staffing within party organizations. Moreover comprehensive, it is clear that parties have large numbers of staff quickly and efficiently. This is not a problem for many organizations, such as election campaigns in the US context are considerably more erratic, especially at the national level (Cotter and Bibby, 1983; Herronson, 1988; Goldman, 1990; Kolodny, 1998). With fixed election times, staffing levels tend to be high during election years and low during ‘off years’. However, there is some evidence of a trend at the subnational level: levels of staffing in both election years and ‘off’ years are on the rise, though admittedly there have been few party staffing and recruitment contracts than paid employees.

The growing role of professional staff is evident in the example of the Liberal Democrats, where party employee turnover is one of the highest in the UK (2000: 2003). As the party employs 20% of its members, whereas the average for all parties is 50%. The party’s high turnover ratio is one of the highest in the UK (2000: 2003). As the party employs 20% of its members, whereas the average for all parties is 50%. The party’s high turnover ratio is one of the highest in the UK.

**Professor**

The discussion has surmised the need for professionalization within party organizations. The evidence is clear that parties have large numbers of staff quickly and efficiently. This is not a problem for many organizations, such as election campaigns in the US context are considerably more erratic, especially at the national level (Cotter and Bibby, 1983; Herronson, 1988; Goldman, 1990; Kolodny, 1998). With fixed election times, staffing levels tend to be high during election years and low during ‘off years’. However, there is some evidence of a trend at the subnational level: levels of staffing in both election years and ‘off’ years are on the rise, though admittedly there have been few party staffing and recruitment contracts than paid employees.

The growing role of professional staff is evident in the example of the Liberal Democrats, where party employee turnover is one of the highest in the UK (2000: 2003). As the party employs 20% of its members, whereas the average for all parties is 50%. The party’s high turnover ratio is one of the highest in the UK (2000: 2003). As the party employs 20% of its members, whereas the average for all parties is 50%. The party’s high turnover ratio is one of the highest in the UK.

This, then, see the centrality of paid party staffing within party organizations. Moreover comprehensive, it is clear that parties have large numbers of staff quickly and efficiently. This is not a problem for many organizations, such as election campaigns in the US context are considerably more erratic, especially at the national level (Cotter and Bibby, 1983; Herronson, 1988; Goldman, 1990; Kolodny, 1998). With fixed election times, staffing levels tend to be high during election years and low during ‘off years’. However, there is some evidence of a trend at the subnational level: levels of staffing in both election years and ‘off’ years are on the rise, though admittedly there have been few party staffing and recruitment contracts than paid employees.

The growing role of professional staff is evident in the example of the Liberal Democrats, where party employee turnover is one of the highest in the UK (2000: 2003). As the party employs 20% of its members, whereas the average for all parties is 50%. The party’s high turnover ratio is one of the highest in the UK (2000: 2003). As the party employs 20% of its members, whereas the average for all parties is 50%. The party’s high turnover ratio is one of the highest in the UK.

This, then, see the centrality of paid party staffing within party organizations. Moreover comprehensive, it is clear that parties have large numbers of staff quickly and efficiently. This is not a problem for many organizations, such as election campaigns in the US context are considerably more erratic, especially at the national level (Cotter and Bibby, 1983; Herronson, 1988; Goldman, 1990; Kolodny, 1998). With fixed election times, staffing levels tend to be high during election years and low during ‘off years’. However, there is some evidence of a trend at the subnational level: levels of staffing in both election years and ‘off’ years are on the rise, though admittedly there have been few party staffing and recruitment contracts than paid employees.

The growing role of professional staff is evident in the example of the Liberal Democrats, where party employee turnover is one of the highest in the UK (2000: 2003). As the party employs 20% of its members, whereas the average for all parties is 50%. The party’s high turnover ratio is one of the highest in the UK (2000: 2003). As the party employs 20% of its members, whereas the average for all parties is 50%. The party’s high turnover ratio is one of the highest in the UK.

This, then, see the centrality of paid party staffing within party organizations. Moreover comprehensive, it is clear that parties have large numbers of staff quickly and efficiently. This is not a problem for many organizations, such as election campaigns in the US context are considerably more erratic, especially at the national level (Cotter and Bibby, 1983; Herronson, 1988; Goldman, 1990; Kolodny, 1998). With fixed election times, staffing levels tend to be high during election years and low during ‘off years’. However, there is some evidence of a trend at the subnational level: levels of staffing in both election years and ‘off’ years are on the rise, though admittedly there have been few party staffing and recruitment contracts than paid employees.

The growing role of professional staff is evident in the example of the Liberal Democrats, where party employee turnover is one of the highest in the UK (2000: 2003). As the party employs 20% of its members, whereas the average for all parties is 50%. The party’s high turnover ratio is one of the highest in the UK (2000: 2003). As the party employs 20% of its members, whereas the average for all parties is 50%. The party’s high turnover ratio is one of the highest in the UK.

This, then, see the centrality of paid party staffing within party organizations. Moreover comprehensive, it is clear that parties have large numbers of staff quickly and efficiently. This is not a problem for many organizations, such as election campaigns in the US context are considerably more erratic, especially at the national level (Cotter and Bibby, 1983; Herronson, 1988; Goldman, 1990; Kolodny, 1998). With fixed election times, staffing levels tend to be high during election years and low during ‘off years’. However, there is some evidence of a trend at the subnational level: levels of staffing in both election years and ‘off’ years are on the rise, though admittedly there have been few party staffing and recruitment contracts than paid employees.
there have been few systematic studies of state party staffing and none in recent years (Gibson et al., 1983). As we will show below, American parties have increased their reliance on paid professionals, but they have done this more by hiring former employees as independent contractors than by employing permanent employees.

The growing reliance of modern parties on paid professional staff is well demonstrated by the example of the British Labour Party (Webb and Fisher, 2003). In 1964 there was one Labour Party employee for every 2766 individual members, whereas by 1998 there was one employee for every 1231 members, a net change of 56 per cent in the staff–membership ratio. The change in this ratio is even more pronounced if we narrow the focus to the real locus of staff growth, the central (extra-parliamentary) party organization; in 1964 there was one central party employee for every 16,000 individual members, but by 1998 there was one for every 2263 members, a change of 86 per cent. Even allowing for the vagaries of measuring party membership accurately, there is no doubt that there has been a substitution of time paid for voluntary labour. We can be confident, given the overall trends in party resourcing across advanced industrial democracies, that the British Labour Party is not atypical in this respect.

This, then, seems to point to the growing centrality of paid professional staff members within party organizations across Western Europe. Moreover, although the data are less comprehensive, there is growing evidence to suggest that parties in post-communist Eastern Europe are much the same. That is, few—outside the communist successor parties themselves—have large memberships, but many have quickly developed their professional staff establishments to run the central party organizations, especially in respect of the management of election campaigns and often on the back of state funding (Kitschelt, 1992; Kopecký, 1995; Lewis, 1994; Lewis and Gortat, 1995; Perkins, 1996; Mair, 1997; Szczepiak, 1999, 2001, 2003; van Biezen, 2000; Olson, 1998; van Biezen and Kopecký, 2003). Essentially the same point could be made in respect of some of the parties in the recently emerging democracies of Latin America (Angell et al., 1992).

Professional political consultants

The discussion of political marketers or consultants has recently become quite rich. Some studies seek to identify these individuals (Farrell et al., 2001; Johnson, 2001; Thurber and Nelson, 2000) while others seek to put their role in the electoral process in context (Kolodny and Logan, 1998; Dulio, 2004). Significant surveys of the consulting industry were conducted in 1999 and 2003 by the Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies at American University, under the direction of James A. Thurber and Candice J. Nelson. These surveys found that consultants tended to have been party employees at an earlier point in their career, believed their party experience to be important in the conduct of their professional activities, and saw their role as complementary to the parties (Thurber, 2000; Kolodny and Logan, 1998). Kolodny (2000) likewise found, in a survey of political party executive directors at the state level, that party officials considered many consultants to be employees in another form—that is, rather than work on the payroll, consultants could be retained as needed for defined projects, which was preferable to retaining large numbers of less trained staff. This body of research clearly points in the direction of regarding professional consultants as a category of party employee—their retention substituting for hiring additional staff in party central offices; while previous party employment is a significant factor in the likelihood of their being awarded the party work. However, others working in this area see the hiring of paid professionals as being done at the expense of party infrastructure (Sabato, 1981; Blumenthal, 1985; Shea, 1996; Nimmo, 2001; Platter, 2001). Most of these studies rely on anecdote rather than on quantitative (and therefore obtain systematic data sets. Indeed, as the profession is still poorly institutionalized, there are no professional organizations or official channels to identify the core of professionals doing party work under this rubric. While collecting data in the US case is difficult, internationally it is virtually impossible (though note the exceptional effort of Farrell and Bowler, 2000).

‘Party’ professionals on the public payroll

Beginning in the 1970s, political scientists began to look closely at the work being carried out by individuals paid by the government in support positions for elected officials. In the US context, Salisbury and Shepsle (1981) declared that a congressional office was an ‘enterprise’ devoted to the manufacture and
maintenance of an important commodity: a positive image of the elected official. While the staff were not engaged in explicitly partisan work (and due to legal restrictions in place for 60 years, must never engage in political work as part of their regular job duties), their dutiful reminders of the goodwill of their bosses when interacting with their constituents meet an implied partisan need. Likewise, Monroe's (2001) study of staff in the constituency offices of elected officials finds that these individuals continually interact with the district staff of other elected officials sharing the same geographic constituency (in the US case, that means a member of the US Congress, a state legislature, or a local county or city municipality) on government matters. This interaction creates close networks that in many ways resemble old-style political machines in that they consist of an elite which is knowledgeable about a wide variety of issues, individuals and political opportunities.

In similar vein, the executive offices contain a number of paid staff who should be considered party staff members. In the US example, there are many offices within the executive branch whose employees perform communications functions that must be seen as party-supporting. These include the White House Press Office, the Office of Communications, speech writers, media relations specialists, and a host of other positions whose occupants are expected to 'spin' the day's events in a favorable light for the president (Grossman and Kumar, 1981; Matless, 1994). Kathryn Dunn Tenpas (2000) explains how political consultants were hired by incumbent presidents to provide advice not only on electoral strategy but also on policy formulation.

In a European context, it is common for some jobs which are, in effect, partisan to be at the expense of the public purse. This has been most obviously so in countries with pronounced traditions of clientelism or patronage, notably the 'partitocratic' cases of Italy and Belgium (Bardi, 2002; Deschouwer, 2002). But almost everywhere some jobs are funded in this way. In the UK, for instance, the governing party is able to rely on a growing number of 'special advisers' appointed at the taxpayer's expense to help ministers. While most Cabinet members are able to appoint up to two such advisers, there is no limit on the number that the prime minister can appoint to assist in the work of the Downing Street machine. Tony Blair has exploited this possibility in an historically remarkable way. When his predecessor John Major left Downing Street in June 1997, he enjoyed the support of just eight special advisers; by 1998/9, Blair had increased this to 25, a level which has remained broadly constant since then. By 2003, some 27 advisers out of 81 who worked across all central government ministries in Whitehall were located in the Prime Minister's Office (Heffernan and Webb, 2005). This development has become increasingly controversial, raising various issues about the autonomy, role and accountability of such advisers. As a result, the Independent Committee on Standards in Public Life (2003) issued a report in which it recommended clear legal definitions of the precise roles and lines of accountability concerning special advisers, a move later backed by the Public Administration Select Committee (2004) of the House of Commons. At the time of writing, however, it seems that the present incumbent of 10 Downing Street is unwilling to embrace all of the structures proposed by these bodies. In any case, it is clear from our perspective that professionals such as these, though notionally 'civil servants', are in effect party servants.

CONCLUSIONS

This brief review demonstrates that the work of party professionals has long been of interest to political scientists. The most typical academic approach has been in effect from the perspective of political sociology. Thus, interest in the social profile, recruitment, socialization, training and activity of employees has been the core motivation of scholarship. These issues remain pertinent today – perhaps ever more so in these times of political consultancy, state-funded parties, and electoral professionalism. The professional staff of party politics lies at, or close to, the nexus of political power across the democratic world. In view of this, there would seem to be a strong case for more wide-ranging, systematic comparative research into their backgrounds and roles. But the key questions, while embracing the concerns of political sociology, could and should go further:

- Who are the professionals of party politics?
- What do they do?
- What implications do they carry for party theory and democratic theory?

In what ways, if at all, can and should they be held accountable? Is there any need to establish a regulatory framework within which they should operate?

We would argue that questions such as these provide a significant agenda for research, though we are under no illusions as to the ease with which it can be conducted. Quite apart from the (funding) lacuna, sociological research is often granted insufficient time to be taken seriously, and parties frequently resist allowing outside observers into their foggy lairs.
from the usual issues of research in general (funding!) and comparative politics in particular (concept stretching and measurement), there is a further potential obstacle in this case: this research depends fundamentally on the willingness of the parties themselves to cooperate in granting access to data and employees. On previous limited experience, this is not a problem to be taken lightly, especially in so far as gathering survey data on party employees is concerned (Webb and Fisher, 2003). On the other hand, individual party employees are often willing to grant interviews and to discuss matters with a striking degree of candour, which suggests that qualitative methods may hold the key to unlocking this particular research programme.

REFERENCES

Bruggins, J. (1999) 'They're organizers Jim, but not as we knew them ... ', Labour Organiser. London: Labour Party.


Wellhofer, E.S. (1979) 'Strategies for party organization and voter mobilization: Britain, Norway and Argentina', *Comparative Political Studies*, 12: 169–204.


