Interest Organizations – A Complex Answer to Political Poverty

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1. Introduction

In 1967 the Norwegian periodical *Kontrast* discussed the unpleasant differences between ideals and realists in the welfare state under the title of "The invisible Norway". The periodical which had a great circle of readers formed the basis of a book three years later. Knut Dahl Jacobsen wrote the introduction article called "Political Poverty" where he pointed out how the situation of the powerless in society is connected to their invisibility caused by lack of influence: "Poverty is conditioned by poverty of influence of political poverty" (Dahl Jacobsen, 1967, 8).

This phrase has often been quoted but not followed up by much empirical research. An important exception is Martinussen's investigation of the participation of different groups on the political arena (Martinussen, 1973). However, the main focus of the socio-political research has been tied to *description* of the situation of the powerless and, to a lesser degree, to which reforms may relieve their situation. In research work, the powerless have only to a limited extent been presented as *politically oppressed*, as weak in relation to the

public bureaucracies and, as members of groups whose interests are not attended to (Bleiklie et al., 1980; Jensen, 1983).

On the other hand, the processes which exert the political influence has been well examined. We know much about the people who have influence, how and through which channels they use it. Moreover, we have a well-defined picture of the strong actors of the economic sector who, by means of their organization, exert an effective influence through the corporate-functional channel (Moren, 1974; Hallenstvedt and Hoven, 1974; Olsen, 1978, 1983). However, this tradition has in many ways been descriptive as well, in the sense that it is the current situation which has been described and analyzed. Consequently, only to a small degree has research been carried out into the mechanisms that excludes other actors and into the possibilities and counteracting strategies of alteration which exist (Mathiesen, 1980). The public bureaucracies have mainly been regarded from above and within, rather than from outside and below. However, the information which has been gathered and analyzed has nevertheless described the situation of the powerless: they are outsiders without efficient tools and channels in relation to the public bureaucracies.

In this way both public bureaucracies and social research have generated the need for a discussion about how the interests of the powerless can be articulated into public policy (Bleiklie et al, 1980; Jensen 1981, 1983). Thus, it is of special interest to consider *interest organizations* as tools for articulating interests. Our political/ administrative system assumes the existence of such an organization to have certain interests of the citizens efficiently attended to. It is therefore obvious that the powerless are in a difficult position with their relative lack of interest organizations. How is it possible for the low status people in society to form organizations, maintain them and use them successfully in relation to the public bureaucracies?

1.2. Organization for low status clients. Dangers on every corner?
In this article we will look at organizations for groups of clients within the health and social sectors.

These organizations deal with different tasks which is unequally stressed. *Work for charity* has a long tradition within the welfare system: in this case it is people's compassion that is appealed to.

Self-help activities are practical therapy for the members of the organizations and emphasize their own resources and therefore threatens the professional welfare system. The third kind of tasks is the essential in our case: Pressure group activities are based on concepts of justified claims and rights which are directed outward. During the last decades this aspect has been strengthened considerably. Two thirds of the Norwegian organizations which exists today, have been founded during the last twenty years, most of them in the last decade (Moren, Hallenstvedt and Christensen, 1976). This growth is connected both with the general development of the political system and the welfare state's legitimation of the rights of the individual.

The client organizations encounter particular difficulties because their members consist of relatively low status people, and it is not difficult to anticipate their problems (Jensen, 1981). The very role as a client which implies the causes that made you a client, created special problems for participation in organizations. In addition to the general problems tied to poverty of resources the clients suffer from lack of self-confidence which often is a result of a long-lasting career as a client. An organization of the powerless will also be more susceptible to influence.

This creates dangers for the growing of oligarchy and different kinds of co-optation from professions, political organizations, bureaucracies and companies. Such processes will result in different kinds of goal displacement (Thompson & McEwen, 1958; Zald & Ash, 1966; Jenkins, 1977; Scott, 1967; Daly, 1969). General assumptions from the organization theory make it easy to predict failure when the powerless attempt to influence politics through the establishment of interest organizations.

On the other hand, several organizations have been established, and some of them seem to have influenced politics in their own field. Consequently, the above-mentioned findings should not be regarded as applicable in every case, but rather as elements of risk. That is why it is essential to specify when these elements (of risk) can be controlled and when they are disastrous.

1.3. Approach
The object of this article is an attempt to analyze some of the processes an organization for and of powerless people experiences

from the very establishment and to the first clarification of organizational goals, structure and pattern of relationships with the environment. Approaching this matter, we presume that any organization must choose an action model for its work (Dahl Jacobsen 1968). The model defines the organization goals and means, and acts as a guiding principle for day-to-day decisions. Also strategic choices of means. Furthermore, an action model will affect the formation of the organization structure and the shaping of the relationship between organization and environment. For an interest organization, the choice of an action model will be a choice of political strategy.

Such a screening policy is not only tied to the member's goals and the internal processes of the organization, but are also closely connected to processes in the environment. The fact that goals are determined in association with other important groups in the task-environment is a well-known finding within the field of organizational theory (Thomson & McEwen, 1958; Etzioni, 1978; Gross, 1969; Cressey, 1958). One of the most important aspects is the relationship of the organization with the administrative and political bodies it wishes to influence.

To the interest organizations, one of the most important elements in an action model will be the degree of conflict or co-operation with the public bureaucracies. The chosen strategies do not only imply that the organization itself ends up by arguing for cleavage or co-operation, but will also effect the frankness of public bureaucracies (Olsen, 1979).

The optimal structure of the organization will depend on the chosen action model. Even though the possibilities are innumerable, we presume that some solutions, some combinations of ideology, co-operation and structure, are easier to cope with than others. It could be said that there is a limited set of well-*balanced* solutions. If an organization is rejected by a public bureaucracy it does not wish to co-operate with, and at the same time has an organizational structure which is unsuitable for co-operation, we have such a well-balanced situation. Another alternative emerges when an organization is accepted by the co-operative public bureaucracy it wants to co-operate with and when it, at the same time, has an ideology which does not differ too much from the prevailing administrative practice or ideology. Olsen (1980) points to the fact that an "exchange relationship1 between "ideological purity1 and participation in govern-

ment is apt to emerge. The entering of the National Federation of Trade Unions into the co-operative channel is described as a parallel process to de-ideologization and a reduction of local branches' tendency to oppose government (Solvang, 1972).

It is one of our hypotheses that the interest organization will be forced into one of the relatively few well-balanced solutions based on the chosen action model. The casual processes in this case have a two-way influence: the structure and the kind of relationship with the environment may force the organization to alter their goals (Messinger, 1955), or, if the organization consider its goal as sacred, a dissolution may be the result (Gusfield, 1955).

Thomas Mathiesen (1971) developed a theory based on the existence of such well-balanced solutions, but where the optimum is to fight for maintaining a situation where no final choice is made. The organization is in a stronger position when it deliberately abstains from defining its strategic attitude too firmly. Otherwise it could result in the organization being expelled, or captured, in both cases rendered harmless by the environment. In the light of our data, we assume that the shaping of an action model will develope through three phases:

a) *phase of establishment,* where the main goal is to found the organization and put it into operation;

b) *phase of ambiguity,* where different attitudes and alternatives to action models are revealed internally and where the environment pushes for a clarification;

c) *phase of decision,* where the different alternatives of action models are put against each other and a final choice is made.

Even though we in the processing have used several concepts which point towards rational processes, for instance "choice", we regard it as an open question whether anyone, or how many of the organizational members or actors in the environment, take part in the processes consciously.

The object of this article is to examine the processes which take place in the interest organization of the powerless concerning the following circumstances:

• What characterizes the phases that the organization passes through from the establishment to an eventual clarification?

• To what extent is choice of action model a result of conscious processes?

- To what extent does the organization drift towards possible models?
- Which consequences will the choice of an action model have to other sides of the organization and its possibilities of goal-attainment?

1.4. Data and method

Studies of organizational processes are best performed by relatively intensive methods, which limit the number of possible cases. We have used data tied to two organizations which approach the same group of clients. The two organizations, which succeed each other in time, have such a different development that they offer instructive contrasts.

Henceforth we will name the two organizations: CLIENTS' WELFARE and CLIENTS' STRUGGLE. In order to avoid recognition of the organizations we have altered some of the quotations and this is marked by brackets.

As far as the latter organization in concerned we use secondary data (Eie, 1978) and our own interviews with most of the key actors. These data capture very well the processes in the executive committee, less well circumstances related to ordinary members and to the relationships between the organization and its environment which includes the central public bureaucracies.

The data concerning the more recent organization CLIENTS' WELFARE are based on our own participant observations for more than four years. These qualitative data are supplemented by interviews with key actors at different stages during the period. In addition, we use more structured data, namely a mailed questionnaire to all the members in one county (N=84), a relatively well-structured questionnaire to all the administrative bodies of the counties and finally a complete examination of the files in the organizational head-quarters.

Because the problems are tied to dynamic processes in the organization, we have to depend on interpretations of observed behaviour and more or less casual manifestations like letters and conversations. The more static and quantitative data are important supplements which may render the hypotheses even more plausible. We want to stress, however, that participant observation, and even participation where systematic observation is only additional infor-

mation, is the method we consider the most vital for the making of hypotheses and for discussion.

We do not want to describe the organizations in every detail, but some features should be mentioned. CLIENTS' STRUGGLE, which was founded a relatively long time ago, has never gained ground to any large extent and it can roughly speaking be said to consist of a few hundred members in the Oslo area. CLIENTS' WELFARE, which is about 5 years old, gained quickly a few thousand members and has continued to grow. There are active local branches in most counties. Executive functions as well as a formal net of communication with central public bureaucracies are being developed.

2. The first phase – organizing and vague enthusiasm

In this section, and the following two, we will describe the development of the two organizations from the foundation until a clarification concerning choice of activity model is reached.

One of the main perspectives within sociology and social science considers the individual as a rational actor.

The "economic man" perspective on the individual's choice of participation in organizations has been much used (Olsen, 1965; Stinchcombe, 1965; Hernes & Martinussen, 1980; Svåsand, 1978). Thus, after having considered the personal gain and loss tied to organizational participation, the individual chooses to participate when realizing that it is to his/her own benefit. One of the assumptions of this view, however, is that the individual fully understands what can be attained from organizational participation.

Our data do not support such assumptions, and below we have quoted some typical answers given at interviews with members of CLIENTS' WELFARE:

This was just right. I had thought for a long time that organization of (clients) was the right thing to do.

I was getting well and felt the responsibility for what I had experienced and wanted to contribute to improving the situation for this group.

I participated in order to discuss experiences and to find out what
should be done to improve the situation (of the clients).

Very few had any definite expectations that the organization would
help them themselves in any way. Neither did they have any clear-
cut and definitre opinion about what the organization ought to do. It
seems that the most fundamental motive for organizing could be
categorized as "idealism", tied to a feeling of loyalty and solidarity
to people who are in the same situation as oneself. The value of
community and social gathering was the only thing mentioned that
could be interpreted into a more rational model.

The above-mentioned mailed questionnaire to members in one
county supports the impression we got from the intensive inter-
views.

Table 1. *Motives given for membership in* CLIENTS' WELFARE

Question: Why did you become a member of the organization?

I hoped it could help me to solve my problems	14,6%
It's important to support the organization	52,4%
In order to meet other people with the same experience	9,8%
Other reasons/combinations	23,2%
	N=82

The alternative that can be interpreted as a "vague, idealistic" rea-
son for membership, were chosen by more than 50% of the respon-
dents. The tendency is almost the same for members with or without
personal client experience, and there are no differences of any
importance between those who have undertaken a task in the orga-
nization and those who have not.

It is complicated to use data from formal questionnaires in order
to find out which intentions people have had for their actions, and
this will be particularly difficult in the case where they were asked
about how strong their understanding had been about the organiza-
tional action model. No-one can be expected to be a reliable source
of information about consistence and firmness of their own opin-
ions, when answering only one direct question.

Table 2. *Opinions about the work of the organization before membership*

Question: Did you have any definite opinions about what
the organization ought to work with when you became a member?

Definite opinions	46%
Not any definite opinions	50%
Don't know/difficult to say	4%

With the above-mentioned reservations in mind, we should like to point out that even though the quantitative data allow us to substantiate the impression of idealistic motives for membership, we get more reserved support for the hypothesis that the members usually had vague ideas about the future formation of the organization.

Those who stated that they had more definite opinions about the organization before joining it, differ from the others also in other ways which may be interpreted as representing an expressive/political profile:

- they had to a larger extent idealistic motives for membership;
- they thought there was too much talk about illness at the meetings, and
- They were considerably more disappointed with the lack of pressure group activity;
- they seemed to be less marked by their role as a client;
- they used less medicine;
- they stated to profit less from and to believe less in activities which can be characterized as self-help, like for instance conversation groups.

Thus, it seems that the members, to a certain degree, may be divided into groups, with slightly different profiles, according to attitudes, expectations and experience. One picture of the situation remains however: there is a relatively low level of understanding as far as tasks and structure of the organization are concerned. This is underlined by the fact that the intensive interviews, which are a more suitable method than the quantitative one, as well as the observations of the development in the executive committee point very clearly in this direction.

Eie (1978) finds parallel characteristics in CLIENTS' STRUGGLE.

If one questions the individual motives among the members of the executive committee for involving themselves in organizational work, it is difficult to give an exact answer. A common characteristic or the motives is an idealistic one. The members wish to improve the conditions or the people in society who are characterized as...

In the period shortly after the establishment, the executive committee in CLIENTS' STRUGGLE attached importance to publishing information about the organization through newspapers and public meetings. They even tried to bring about a television program. The very purpose of the organization is in these situations presented rather vaguely, in line with the answers shown in tables 1 and 2.

The report from the establishment of CLIENTS' WELFARE, and interviews with the informal groups preceding the actual forming of the organization, give a similar impression. There is a general dissatisfaction with their situation in society as well as with the treatment system, and there is agreement about the organization being a useful tool. The members may have different opinions, but as far as the organization is concerned they have "an open mind", without definite ideas on how the organization line of action should be.

One of the reasons for this is that neither the ordinary members nor the originators have much experience with organizations and political activity.

Both the constitutional meeting and the first set of object clauses of CLIENTS' WELFARE were characterized by general formulations which could be interpreted in many directions. The files from the first period show, as for CLIENTS' STRUGGLE, that the activity of the organization is tied to necessary division of labor in the executive committee as well as to making the environment acquainted with the organization. CLIENTS' WELFARE succeeded to a greater extent in their efforts and they even entered into preliminary negotiations with other organizations and institutions in the task environment.

Consequently, as far as both organizations are concerned, it is difficult to find evidence in support of participation being based on rationality for personal gain. Neither can it be said that the various members, including the individuals initiating the organizations, had clear ideas of which action model to choose. Most of the members state that the entering into the organization was connected with enthusiasm. In parenthesis it can be mentioned that the many inter-

viewed members in CLIENTS' WELFARE stated that they now, some years later, have a feeling of "vague frustration", because nothing much happened, they have not learned very much and they are still uncertain about what they themselves can do for the organization.

Conclusively, we may say that the first phase with its vague enthusiasm is characterized by great tolerance and ambiguity with regard to choice of action model, a choice which was not an item on the agenda of the organization, or of the individual member.

3. Second phase – ambiguity and conflicts

The very establishment of an interest organization contains elements of protest based on dissatisfaction with the situation (Mathiesen, 1973; Eckstein, 1971). What distinguishes interest organizations from charity and self-help oriented organizations is precisely the fact that they define an adversary that they want to influence.

The second phase is characterized by the fact that they have to make a decision about how they best can exert an influence. During this phase conflicts develope as it becomes evident that the members have different opinions about this issue.

3.1. Conflicts in CLIENTS' WELFARE

After having spent some months on technical organizational tasks and activities which aim at introducing the organization to the environment, members of the executive committee felt a need for settling argument about how to exert an influence most effectively. The first issue of the informative periodical to the members selects the formation of "the future profit and policy of the organization" as the most important task of the executive committee, and several working committees were formed.

The leader of the provisional executive committee is in many ways an exception to the vagueness which was predominant in the first phase. He had long organizational experience and had from the very beginning a definite opinion about which action model he preferred. On the constitutional meeting he stressed that the organization ought to present opinions that were based on "constructive pro-

posals" and choose a "sincere organizational appearance". The leader was interviewed by the news media the same day, and he was asked whether he supported the criticism of the institutions which had emerged:

> ...I think the criticism is too badly nuanced and not well-founded – and it goes beyond us who use the system, and not to forget the relatives, and it is not exactly fitted for creating confidence in the treatment system.

When we interviewed the leader, he gave further details about the policy the organization in his opinion ought to choose.

> The most important thing for us is to be accepted as a serious adversary. It is necessary to be accepted by the political authorities, because we are dependent on them to have our opinions heard. In order to achieve this, we have to build an organizational and administrative framework. Our attitude towards the authorities must be businesslike and confrontations ought to be avoided. This is also important for avoiding internal split.

Gradually, the interest of the other members of the executive committee turned in a different direction. Many of them were concerned about the treatment in the institutions and reacted negatively to the strong priority of mere administrative tasks.

> The leader was mostly concerned about the organization and how to build it up, while we were concerned about the situation of the clients. We did not, on our opinion, need a big organization. The problems concerning maltreatment of clients were again, for us, the most important tasks the organization ought to work with. The leader disagreed strongly with this. (A member of the executive committee.)

The files show that several members of the executive committee had the same reactions. One of them expresses this view in a letter to the leader:

> When the stay in institutions in itself is the cause for loss of self-preservation, there must be SOMETHING VERY WRONG! IT

IS NOW TIME FOR THE ORGANIZATION TO MAKE IT CLEAR TO THE AUTHORITIES THAT... I am fully aware of the fact that it is not possible to use the conflict-strategy of the CLIENTS' STRUGGLE, but we must not be afraid of obvious truths.

Consequently, the leader's co-operative model, with a wish to avoid confrontations and with emphasis on organizational structure, came into conflict with the wish of the majority in the committee to involve the organization in work for helping the clients in the institutions. At an early stage, the leader interpreted this to be expressions of fundamentally different views, and he was of the opinion that it was not possible to combine his view with the others' wish to involve the organization in cases where the clients were subject to maltreatment. He had an understanding of the "opposition" in the committee not wanting to follow the rules and "representing a fighting line that only wanted to destroy". The others were of a different opinion:

We also agreed that we had to co-operate with the authorities and behave politely. But we were at the same time in favor of the organization representing a critical line which cracked down on errors and maltreatment. That is why we thought it was important to focus on the activity or the treatment system. (The secretary of the executive committee.)

We were all in favor of a sane dialogue with the authorities. The most important was to point out the errors which were committed at the institutions and how inefficiently the protection boards were working. But the leader was afraid of criticizing too heavily. (A member of the executive committee.)

Several of the members in the committee wanted fundamental discussions in order to define the profile of the organization. Six months after the establishment, this item appeared on the agenda for the first time, but the meeting was closed before the issue had been properly discussed. The secretary regrets this in a letter to the leader:

As far as the last committee meeting is concerned, I have a depressing feeling that we did not make any progress... it is also

frustrating that we can only discuss a matter up to a certain point before it becomes controversial. And then the disagreement tends to be minimized. I hope this is an unconscious process...

A study of the notices of the committee meetings shows repeated attempts to raise such fundamental issues, but the book of minutes from the same period indicates that little was achieved, and gradually it becomes obvious that the majority of the committee represents "an opposition" to the leader.

We, in the opposition, wanted a fundamental discussion about the policy of the organization. It never took place. There was always something else to be discussed first. The leader talked and talked and suddenly the meeting was closed. I think this is how the conflicts in the committee started. (A member of the executive committee.)

He presided at the meetings in a nice, easy way and it ended pleasantly after a lively discussion. The differences were, in one way or another, manipulated, and eventually they were lost. Only after the meetings, I started wondering what really had happened. (The secretary of the executive committee.)

Little by little, this situation created aggression in the executive committee. The conflicts were intensified and gradually the leader's external functions were criticized as well. He had dominated the external work from the beginning and the others thought originally that it was all right to be relieved of work in this way. The leader's great organizational experience, his acquaintances and possibilities of travelling had made him the dominant one as far as contact with the environment was concerned, and this was also the case when new local branches of the organization were to be established. In addition, he had mail to the organization sent to his place and had direct contact with the local branches.

As the conflicts increased, the committee wanted stronger control of the actions of the leader. The book of minutes shows that the leader was constantly reproached for acting single-handed.

He often neglected to inform us about important issues. He wanted to be sovereign. He travelled around on his own and estab-

lished local branches and did other things without telling us. When we suggested that another member of the committee could join him, he answered that he did not want any watch-dog. (A member of the executive committee.)

Consequently, the disagreement assumed the form of conflicts concerning the democracy in the committee. However, these conflicts were based on political dissension about which policy and action model the organization ought to choose. Our data give, at the same time, the impression that "the opposition" did not realize where the dividing lines virtually went. First and foremost, they were frustrated because the organization was not involved in matters which they found important. A greater involvement in these matters was, in their opinion, not conflicting the leader's emphasis on co-operation and a diplomatic style. Because the differences were not clearly expressed and because the members had not succeeded by fundamental discussions to lay bare the causes for the conflicts, the problem took another and derivative form: the democracy in the executive committee was called in question. The political dissension became even more nebulous by the personal differences, especially between the leader and the secretary, that emerged.

As the conflicts gradually became more intense, the opposition found that the leader's considerably larger organizational experience was becoming more problematic and impeded the activities. The following quotations may illustrate this feeling:

The rest of us were too weak. We lacked organizational experience. The leader was sovereign, and we had no other candidate comparable to him. It was the secretary who most often spoke his mind, but he had no organizational experience. (A member of the executive committee.)

In a letter to the leader we can see how intense this antagonism had become:

It seems that (the secretary's) experiences from the treatment system are so traumatic and his opinions about how to run the organization so subjective that he simply is not suited to have an important position in the organization. I think this meeting was a strain to him and I pity him, but in this case we have to be hard-

handed...Therefore – let us have it out next Wednesday. I am sorry to have to make such a heavy attack on a man's opinions... but desperate diseases need desperate remedies.

The final confrontation in the executive committee took place at a meeting for which two agendas were prepared, one by the leader and one by the secretary. In reality, neither of them was followed. Instead a discussion arose about the practice that the leader had followed when establishing a journal for the organization, and the opposition insisted on a voting as to whether the leader's candidate for editor should be present at the meeting, whereby the leader left and resigned his office, interpreting the critic as distrust.

Then the phase of crystallization of different alternatives to action model had arrived at a stage where there is an explicit break between the leader and one of the committee members on the one hand, and the rest of the committee on the other.

It is obviously a disagreement as to choice of action model that is underlying the antagonism which presents itself as a conflict of democracy in the executive committee. The two alternatives are on the one hand a clearly defined line of co-operation and on the other a line which stresses the discussion about maltreatment, with the implied potentials for conflict. Only the leader described the differences in such political terminology. The others rather experienced a vague political disagreement without any distinct dividing lines, but they were distressed and irritated because they were not allowed to work with the subjects they thought were important, and focused on the leader's undemocratic behaviour.

3.2. The conflicts in CLIENTS' STRUGGLE.

In the organization CLIENTS' STRUGGLE a similar development took place. However, in this case it became clear at an earlier stage in which direction the differences developed. On the one side there was a strong and conflict-oriented attitude towards political legal-protection work, and on the other a line which stressed social work among the members. Such a contrast is more fundamental than the one that arose in CLIENTS' WELFARE. In this case it is the characteristics of the organization as interest organization or as self-help organization that are being discussed (Gordon and Babcheek, 1959; Rose, 1954; Maciver, 1936; Mathiesen, 1973). Relatively soon after

the establishment of the organization, a committee member accused the assistant secretary for wanting to "canalize the activity of the organization into forms which implied a co-operation with the established psychiatry" as well as for having applied for public funding. The leading representative of the conflict-oriented line stated:

> We are not able to accomplish anything at all until we have the public opinion on our side, unless we turn to the Health Authorities and that is a dangerous way to go. The risk is that the Health Authorities get a certain hold over the organization.

The organization towards work for legal protection had such a strong position that special positions were tied to this – "Consultants of legal protection". There were two such consultants, both of them belonging to the most conflict-oriented. The activities of these consultants were external and several matters were dealt with. Also in CLIENTS' STRUGGLE the conflicts in this phase had to a great extent the appearance of personal antagonism.

> Because the members are not conscious of the conflict, and have not taken a definite stand on the question, the conflict usually manifests itself indistinctly on the executive meetings of the organization: the committee members lack confidence in themselves and in the others, and the criticism often seems unfair because it is person-oriented and not task-oriented. (Eie, 1978, p 71)

> Conflicts will always arise between people who work according to two different goals. The tug of war will always be there, often covered by personal antagonism and hostility. (A member of the executive committee.)

The member who gave this statement is relatively resourceful with degree in criminology. He and the leader of the faction of legal protection, both "consultants of legal protection", are the members who are most conscious of an attitude of legal protection and of conflict. Several years passed without any essential alterations in the situation. The secretary was the most important exponent of social welfare among the clients and the two consultants the most important representatives of an extrovert legal protection-orientation.

The conflict was intensified by a single case in which one of the consultants had been involved. In a letter to a mother of a client, she wrote among other thing:

I am shocked to hear that you as a mother has allowed him to be put under tutelage... Don't you have a feeling, yourself, of having done something wrong? I enclose a letter to the controlling body at the hospital, which you are to sign and send... If this is not done, we have to use other methods, for example the press.

As a result of this, the mother of the client sent a letter to the controlling body and asked them to discharge her son immediately. This led to a conversation between the medical officer of health and the mother, and the doctor was shown the letter from CLIENTS' STRUGGLE. He complained to the Ministry of Health through The Norwegian Medical Association. The Ministry of Health sent a sharp letter to the organization saying among other things:

...Your letter has an unfortunate shaping and contains a formulation which says that your organization "will have to use other methods, for example, the press", to get the mother of the client to sign...and we strongly request your organization to use a more human procedure in the future to promote its causes.

The secretary who received the letter, quickly sent a regret to the Ministry of Health, which answered that "the content of the letter, had been registered" and that they awaited "information about the result of the handling of the case in the executive committee". Consequently, the secretary sent out notice of an executive meeting. At the meeting, two proposals were submitted for the members' opinion. One of them further condemned the action of the involved consultant, and the other one, which was formulated by the consultant herself, implied that the organization supported the procedure. The proposal, that condemned the action was carried against one vote.

Now the conflict became open and strong. The involved consultant sent her own letter to the Ministry of Health where she dissociated herself from the statement of the organization and defended her own action. This resulted in another letter from the secretary to the Ministry of Health and to the members of the executive committee

which referred both to the current conflict and to the underlying antagonism.

> It is the majority of the executive committee that make binding decisions for CLIENTS' STRUGGLE. "XX" will have to put up with this democratic arrangement. To arrange social gatherings, briefing conferences, meetings, to pay visits and to talk to clients; isn't that to do something positive for the clients as well?... I think CLIENTS' STRUGGLE will achieve just as much for their clients by trying to co-operate and by negotiating with the authorities – instead of forcing its way through. The reputation of CLIENTS' STRUGGLE will be bad and ridiculous if the authorities are our adversary:

The consultant involved declared on her side that "the executive committee attacks me by pure fear of authorities and by fear of losing the financial support of the Ministry".

The quote is from the consultant's letter to the Ministry of Health and should throw light upon the intensity of the conflict. After these incidents, the conflict emerged clearly. The two consultants who most strongly articulated the line of conflict were now in minority and were less involved in committee-work. The executive committee gave higher preferences to social work, but the final clarification of the conflict turned out to reverse the power structure.

3.3. The conflict phase in sums

The conflicts started as a vague disagreement about action model. As the discrepancies gradually were enlarged, they were perceived differently, and assumed to a great extent the form of antagonism between organizational practice and internal democracy on the one hand and mere personal conflicts on the other. Both organizations had, from the beginning, some members in the executive committee with relatively definite opinions as to which strategies to choose, but this was articulated only after some time and thereby created conflicts. In addition to personal antagonism, the conflict takes the form of different opinions concerning democracy and freedom of action in committee work. In both cases, it was the faction that had relatively strong and clear-cut opinions that ended up in opposition to the rest of the committee and was reproached for undemocratic

behaviour. However, the content of the underlying conflict was different in the two cases, but the attitude towards co-operation with the authorities as well as the attitude towards maltreatment of the individual client are joint themes. It is also worth noticing that the conflict in CLIENTS' STRUGGLE was provoked by the direct intervention of the Ministry of Health that was understood to be a support of one of the factions. As far as CLIENTS' WELFARE in concerned, we have not well-defined indications of the importance of the environment, but the leader stresses several times that his personal contacts in the Ministry and in professional organizations mentioned to him that it was important for the organization to act reasonably, and not the way CLIENTS' STRUGGLE did.

Since the conflict resulted in a break in the executive committee, we have now come to the phase in which a clarification took place.

4. Third phase – clarification

In order to influence political circumstances the interest organizations need an action model that defines which tasks are essential, why they are important and which means to use. Choice of action model determines the organizational structure and the relationships between an organization and its environment. Both internally and in the environment, there is a need for defining a clear action model. The situation for both organizations in this phase indicates that it seems impossible to cope with several action models at the same time, and the choice seems to lie between different versions of co-operation – and conflict models.

4.1. Clarification in CLIENTS' WELFARE

After the break in the executive committee of CLIENTS' WELFARE where the leader in protest resigned his office and left the meeting, there was confusion as to this position. He sent a letter to the committee saying that he was willing to continue if they agreed with his view. The committee answered that they wanted him back if he conformed to certain conditions, for instance that "the leader does not act on his own without consulting the committee". The leader did not show up on the next committee meeting where the agenda had

the item: "Who is the leader of the organization?" It said in the notice of the meeting:

> ...the total confusion that seems to rule. I will mention that the leader has partly said that he resigns in protest, partly that he wants welfare or sick leave, partly that he will come back; together with the fact that he goes to Arendal as representative of the organization....

This confusion and ambiguity lasted for several months, actually up to the first regular national conference of the organization. The leader continued to act on behalf of the organization.

The leader wrote a press release which stated that the organization was taken over by an "extreme sect" and that he withdrew because of the policy which had become prevailing in the organization. The press release was never sent out, or it was withdrawn before being published, but it was used actively towards the rest of the committee. The remaining faction in the executive committee ("the opposition") did not make any serious attempts to take a common action and take command of the organization in the period before the national conference. They were frightened by the leader's threat to send out the press release and leave the organization for ever. They did not know what to do and hoped as long as possible for a reconciliation. In connection with the summon to and organizing of the national conference, the majority of the executive committee was outdistanced.

The preparations were administered from another part of the country, and the papers concerning the national conference were sent out from this place as well. The leader was together with "his" committee member and selected representatives from a few county-branches. The majority of the committee knew about this, but had their own planned executive meeting, without doing anything about it.

The notice of the national conference was therefore signed by only two committee-members, and in the notice, it was argued for the line the leader represented. A draft to a general activity program was enclosed. The idea of a detailed and concrete activity program that would commit the executive committee was turned down:

> ...the organization is still new. That is why it will be entirely wrong to plan a detailed activity program... We are not strong

enough, and neither do we benefit from confrontations with the authorities. Nobody profits from our isolating ourselves in a fighting organization... We will suggest that the new executive committee is authorized to work on this basis.

Furthermore, the proposal called in general wording attention to which tasks the committee should work with. It was a list of several types of tasks connected with development of the organizational framework and the secretariat, but nothing was mentioned about tasks tied to the clients' situation and interests. The proposal was in favor of a clear co-operative line. It was in addition not particularly concrete and gave much authority to the executive committee. At the same time, the proposal gave the impression that other members supported a fighting line that would isolate the organization. This interpretation of the leader is not confirmed by interviews and data from files.

The majority of the executive committee did not consider themselves as representing any clear fighting line. In the first place, they dissociated themselves explicitly from the line represented by the consultants in CLIENTS' STRUGGLE, and they also often stressed that they wanted "co-operation and a sound dialogue". However, it is nevertheless obvious that the leader and the majority of the committee had different opinions as to co-operation/conflict.

The day before the national conference, the leader was interviewed in a paper. Here he pointed to the danger of cleavage and to the difference of opinion which unfortunately had arisen in the executive committee, and he hoped that support to the distributed proposal would make a cleavage unnecessary and secure the organization against infiltration by political groupings thatwant to transform it into an "extreme sect".

4.1.1. The national conference

At the national conference it was the leader's faction that dominated the very procedure of the meetings. In his introductory speech, the leader stressed the danger of the organization becoming a "sectarian fighting organization".

During the handling of both the agenda and the annual report, the majority of the committee and other members tried to have the differences in the committee discussed. This resulted in long discus-

sions where several people claimed that "the members ought to know what had been going on as there is so much mess we do not know anything about". The discussion did not end in any clarification, partly because the majority was insecure and cautious about bringing up the conflicts in all its bearings and partly because the chairman and the leader were quick about cutting the debates before a possible proposal or clarification was made.

During the debate concerning the dispatched proposal for "activity program" the secretary of the committee suggested that the report from one of the subcommittees should be treated at the same time. It was the secretary who led the work with this report. Its content was much more critical to the treatment system than what was expressed in the leaders proposal. It recommended, among other things, that CLIENTS' WELFARE ought to participate in arrangements the 1st of May and the 8th of May together with other organizations of oppressed groups. This resulted in a long debate with contributions for and against the principle of a "soft" line, but without clarifying what actually was behind the disagreement. The people in charge of the meeting avoided putting the report of the committee to the vote and it all ended with the leader's proposal being accepted as general lines for future work of the executive committee. The report from the subcommittee was forwarded to the executive committee for further processing and for distribution to the members (which never took place).

The proposal concerning organizational rules was approved as suggested. This was the most extensive document of the national conference and strengthens the impression of the leader's priority to a "formally correct" organizational system.

The recommendation of the electoral committee was more or less adopted. No-one from the previous majority of the executive committee had been suggested, asked to stand for election or informed. The national conference on the whole, resulted in a complete clarification where the leader and his line assumed control over the organization through an executive committee that consisted of his own adherents, and which is an approval of a vague co-operative line and extensive authorities given to the executive committee. Whether or not this gives a picture of the attitude of the members present at the conference is difficult to know. The conference in general appeared chaotic. However, the decision-making processes seemed efficiently directed from the table of the chairman as far as

the above-mentioned cases are concerned. The handling of a pro-
posal for a resolution which criticized the Ministry of Health in a
public conflict matter, indicated that the delegates were not consoli-
dated on a consistent co-operative line. The leader was reluctant to
the critical proposal as it was important not to "upset anybody".
From the floor, it was argued that "the organization must be allowed
to express an opinion in such matters, if it should express opinions
about anything at all". The resolution was carried in a somewhat
reduced form against the votes of the faction of the leader. One case
concerning the distribution of subscriptions between central and
local unities, was also lost for the faction of the leader in a way that
strengthened the economy of the local unities. However, this is two
exceptions to a definite victory for the leader's line.

It is important to stress that this clarification concerned relations
of power. After the national conference there was no doubt as to
which faction won or in which direction they framed the organiza-
tional action model. On the other hand, it is not possible to find a
clarifying process where the possible action models are formulated,
discussed, and eventually put on the vote.

After the national conference "the opposition" has on the whole
continued in the organization as common members. Six months
after the conference they tried, in vain, to submit a statement to the
organizational journal. It says among other things:

(In the minutes of the national conference) we were alarmed to
see that there are (were) sectarian attitudes within CLIENTS'
WELFARE. Since it is publicly well-known that there was dis-
agreement in the provisional committee, it is natural to conclude
that "the sect" must be us, 5/6 of the executive committee. It has
been said that the soft line won. But what does that mean? The
five of us do not form a unity. Nevertheless, we go in for the soft
values, but not at the expense of sacrificing the courage of one's
convictions. If the organization shall do anything for our groups,
we must be allowed to take a firm standpoint towards the authori-
ties. No-one wins without fighting for what they believe in. But
this fight shall of course be fair and the form possibly "soft" in
the sense of diplomatic. If we become so "soft" that the contours
are erased and if we surpass the authorities in bureaucratic com-
plexity, CLIENTS' WELFARE has no future. The intention was hard-
ly that the organization should be some kind of guarantor for the

policy which is prevailing at any time in the Ministry of Social Affairs. We have complied to the rules to the best of our abilities. And what's more – we have acted openly. That is why we expect that this statement will be published immediately in the organizational journal in an unabridged form.

This quotation is probably the closest "the opposition" ever came to a unification and an articulation of a joint standpoint.

The development of CLIENTS' WELFARE after the national conference may be summarized as follows:
- development of a central secretariate, to some extent at the expense of local activities
- formal representation in public bodies
- recruitment campaigns executive from central quarters, training of delegates, but little importance attached to the mobilizing of members locally
- the external initiatives are concentrated to after-care, housing and other subjects about which there are general agreement.

4.2. Clarification in CLIENTS' STRUGGLE

We know less about the phase of clarification in CLIENTS' STRUGGLE. After the break in the committee and up to the general assembly the faction of legal protection consolidated its position. They still controlled the most important external work (consultant activities) which contributed to strengthening their position. Some months before the general assembly the secretary, who dominated the faction of "welfare work" made it clear that she wanted to resign because "after conversations she understood that several members of the organization wanted to transform it into a direct pressure group". At the general assembly the whole faction around the secretary supported this standpoint and resigned "in protest". The exception was a committee member who let herself be elected as secretary of the new executive committee. Later on she resigned owing to "difficulties in co-operating with the new committee".

The process of clarification ended with the organization getting rid of the supporters of a "co-operative line" and advocating a clear "line of conflict" concerning matters of legal protection. The organization as a whole had obviously stagnated and was not able to compete when CLIENTS' WELFARE was established. Some of the

members who left the organization in protest to the "line of con-
flict" later joined CLIENTS' WELFARE, where they belong to the
"opposition" which is regarded as "conflict-orientated".

In both organizations the clarification resulted in a choice of
action model, and the new executive committee was completely
formed by the line that had won. As far as CLIENTS' WELFARE is
concerned, we have a clear view of this phase, and we can see that
the clarification in many ways took place without the choice of
action model, or the premises of this choice, having been discussed
at the national conference. Consequently, we can say that there was
a clarification without disclosure of underlying political alternative.
The opposition that comprised the majority of the executive com-
mittee felt slighted and found that their standpoints were carica-
tured, and they lost completely. They seemed almost incapable of
acting in this process. This was due partly to lack of organizational
experience and inconsistencies in their own opinions, but mostly to
the fact that they were incapable of acting because they did not dare
to take the responsibility for the resignation of the leader and
builder of the organization and were afraid they would be character-
ized in public as an "extreme sect".

Externally there are surprisingly many common features in the
two winning factions:

• they articulate their view at an early stage
• they had greater organizational experience and resources than the
  others
• they controlled central external functions
• they were accused of being above the democracy in the executive
  committee
• they ended up in a minority position and became isolated (in the
  executive committee) in the period prior to the definite clarifica-
  tion.

Parts of the joint characteristics may be coincidental and the next
paragraph will discuss possible systematic feature.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The three different phases: (1) establishment, (2) ambiguity and conflict, and (3) clarification can be seen in both of the organizations we have studied. We presume that organizations of low status clients which are established with the general purpose of serving the interests of the group will go through these phases.

5.1. Establishment
In the first phase we found that members possessed a vague enthusiasm in the sense that they did not have any definite preferences as to organizational action model. Neither were they concerned about what they personally could obtain by participation, but stressed that they were motivated by idealistic goals, like wanting to improve the situation of their own group.

This finding is in opposition to the tradition which looks at organizational participation as rational for the individual according to the principle of maximizing utility, borrowed from micro-economic theory. However, we would like to call attention to the fact that this finding may have moderate generality. Clark and Wilson (1961) claim that interest organizations may be divided into two (ideal) types. On the one hand, there are *utilitarian* organizations whose purpose it first and foremost the attainment of material benefits for their members and which use this kind of advantages as part of their recruitment policy (Olsen, 1965). Modern trade-unions may be examples of such organizations. On the other hand there are *purposive* organizations wanting to improve the social conditions of the groups they work for and they are concerned about the life situation of their group.

Interest organizations for the powerless come within this last category. It is natural to assume that members of organizations belonging to the first group make rational decisions according to loss and gain, while it is less obvious that members of purposive organizations take this into consideration. Furthermore, a purposive organization will find "the problem of non-paying passengers" (Olsen, 1965; Hernes & Martinussen, 1980) more or less irrelevant. It can be added that the motives of the organizations in the phase of establishment are to a greater extent built on idealism.

A well-established, bureaucratic organization, rich in traditions, is to a lesser degree capable of creating an ambience where the idealism flourish (White, 1969).

5.2. Ambiguity and conflicts

In the second phase the issue concerning choice of action model is on the agenda. It was a joint feature in both of our organizations that this took the shape of personal antagonism and discussions about democracy and freedom in the executive committee. Only after that could the alternatives to action models be formulated so distinctly that they gave rise to contradictions. It would be wrong to conclude that all the members took part in choosing an action model. It might just as well be said that the *organizations* were driven towards a choice and that these processes to a certain extent took place independently of the members' conscious participation (March, 1981). In these cases the organization drifted towards important decisions more or less behind the actors' back. This is another tendency to be expected in organizations for the powerless since few members have any particular organizational experience or definite models for organizational work. The process, however, is far from blind, since important actors in the environment (The letter the Ministry of Health sent CLIENTS' STRUGGLE) as well as members with definite ideas and organizational experience may influence the process considerably (Selznick, 1966; Komarovsky, 1949).

5.3. Clarification

In the third phase a choice of action model took place. In both organizations it was the faction controlling important external functions that won. In CLIENTS' STRUGGLE it was the consultants, and in CLIENTS' WELFARE it was the leader of the executive committee, who dominated almost all the external connections, also where the local branches were concerned. This is in accordance with a main finding in the organizational theory which stresses that:

Power adheres to those who cope with the critical problems of the organization. (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974)

As far as an interest organization is concerned, its relation to the members and to the authorities will be "critical problems". In our cases it is those who have this control who are victorious even though they have been in minority for a period. We see very clearly the advantage of an "early starter" as the victorious factions comprised the members who first formulated their mission. The members with most organizational experience were also found in these factions. We assume that all these elements very easily will be influential especially in organizations of low status clients, both because their members in general have little organizational experience and because many of them lack self-confidence. Consequently, they tend to be submissive in relation to their own organization, a fact which point to another basic issue, that is not discussed here, namely the dangers tied to development of oligarchy in organizations of powerless people (Michels, 1962; Blau & Scott, 1963; Jensen, 1981; Froestad, 1982).

5.4. The search for a well-balanced action model

We suggested initially that there were action models more well-balanced than others. These may be well-balanced according to two different aspects. Firstly, they ought to be consistent and predictable seen from within the organization as well as from the task environment. In this connection it is worth noticing that the people who were considered too co-operation-oriented in CLIENTS' STRUGGLE, and who left the organization, were the same people that later on were regarded as too conflict-oriented in CLIENTS' WELFARE. This may signify that there were three action model involved in the process totally. The two models which actually won had a clear and unambiguous attitude, while the one that was rejected in both organizations was more indistinctly structured and laying somewhere between the other two. This model is probably too unbalanced and ambiguous for an organization to cope with.

Secondly, the action model ought to be well-balanced so that there is concord between the mission on the one hand and organization structure and relationships to the environment on the other. The organizational structure that goes together with one type of ideology, does not necessarily fit another.

If the action model is based on assumptions about persuasion and information being the most important means, it is natural to try to

build a organization with many members. This provides economy and bargaining power. Furthermore, it is essential to have a smooth organizational system with an efficient secretariat and well-trained representatives/employees who have enough competence to maintain their ground in the co-operative channel (Hallenstvedt & Hoven, 1974; Mitchell, 1975). It is not considered to be a weakness of any importance that the members are submissive. On the contrary, "undisciplined activities" between the rank and file members may represent problems, because the bargaining power is also dependent on the management's capacities to control these members (Michels, 1962; Daly, 1969; Warner, 1955). Besides, such an organization is apt to be formed by the structure of the public bureaucracies as it will attempt to resemble the organization it wants to influence (Eckstein, 1971).

If, on the other and, the action model is based on the assumptions that impact on decisions in public bureaucracies is a result of political power in an antagonistic setting, the strategies will be connected with the development and the use of means of power. The low status groups have few means of enforcing their will. Most commonly these groups reveal their intense feelings and their situations through actions and demonstrations of different kinds. In this case they need a "politically efficient" organization with many loyal and active members who are enthusiastic and willing to take part in actions. This strategy will imply that the *number* of members will be of less significance in relation to the more qualitative characteristics of the members.

In this perspective it is easy to see that the action model which emerged after the clarification in CLIENTS' WELFARE was a well-balanced one. Not only did this organization want to co-operate with obliging public bureaucracies, but they developed the secretariat and mobilized the members in number as well, while the activating of the members were not given particular priority of tasks. We may expect this organization to be well-adapted and "successful" for several years.

The situation is obviously more problematic for CLIENTS' STRUGGLE. There is little doubt that they have chosen an action model whose philosophy is conflict and fight for power, but they have certainly not built an organization suitable for this fight. The executive committee did very little to motivate the members to active participation in "the fight". We therefore presume that CLI-

ENTS' STRUGGLE in all probability will not be a great organization. We rather expect a continuing dissolution. The organization is just as dangerous as one angry lemming.

CLIENTS' WELFARE seems in our opinion, to have chosen the model which is the easiest one to handle for the organization, but which, in the long run might imply great dangers for ending up in a situation where the organization is regarded as "successful", but has lost its mission on the way. Such processes will easily evolve in purposive organizations with vague and general goals (Warner and Havens, 1967; Olsen, 1979).

The dangers tied to the model of CLIENTS' STRUGGLE are the opposite. Its organizational structure and pattern of relationships invite to a small extent to co-operation processes and goal displacement, but it doesn't seem capable of creating a great and forceful organization. In this model there is a danger of maintaining the mission but loosing the organization.

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