The Elusive Nature of National Party Organization in Canada and Australia

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A federal form of government presumes the existence of two forums for electoral competition—provincial/state and national. Much of the literature on parties in federations has been concerned with the nature and extent of partisan differences between national and provincial representation, and their significance for the operation of the federal system (for example, Riker 1964; Smiley 1987, 101-124; Thorlakson 2005). To use Smiley's terminology, the question can be framed in terms of the extent to which parties are integrated— the same partisan loyalties are in play at both provincial and national elections—or confederal, characterised by differing patterns of partisan competition for representation in provincial and national legislatures (Smiley 1987, 103-104).

Although some studies mention party organization as an important component in assessing the degree of partisan integration (Smiley 1987; and note Riker 1964, 131-134), there has been little systematic examination of the nature of national parties in federations. It has been assumed that if the same parties—particularly if they are disciplined mass parties—contest both provincial and national elections and gain similar vote shares in both forums, national and provincial parties will be joined in a single hierarchy. Provincial components will be closely linked, and subordinate, to the national branch of each party, a situation congruent with a strongly centralized federal system (Thorlakson 2005). Conversely, if the pattern of partisan competition differs

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between national and provincial elections, and there are strong regional variations in the support for national parties, national party structures will be distinct from provincial parties; organizational links between national and provincial parties will be weak or non-existent, consistent with a decentralized federal system.

But it is not clear that these assumptions square with the way national parties operate in parliamentary federations, particularly those in which gaining representation in the national lower house is dependent on electing candidates from single member electoral districts. The demands of parliamentary discipline at the national level, coupled with the need to win seats in highly dispersed, local electoral districts, are the same in both integrated and confederal party systems. This should mean that the demands shaping the structure of national party organizations in such federal systems should be similar, whatever the dynamics of provincial political parties.

A way to test these assumptions is to find federations which share the same parliamentary and electoral characteristics, but vary in the extent to which the party systems at the provincial level differ from that of the national party system. Canada and Australia provide cases for just such a comparison. They have similar federal and governmental institutions, they share a common parliamentary tradition, and both use single member districts and majoritarian electoral systems to choose representatives for the lower house of their national parliaments, the Canadian House of Commons, and the Australian House of Representatives.

Although national politics has been dominated by two parties in both federations since shortly after federation—Canada 1867, Australia 1901—they have had widely differing patterns of regional partisan symmetry. For over a hundred years, Canada has seen growing regional asymmetry in the support of the two largest national parties, Liberal and Conservative, and the persistence of a range of regionally based parties which have been significant in provincial government, but much less so in national electoral contests. Since 1910, Australia has seen politics at both state and national levels strongly shaped by contests between the Australian Labor Party and the Liberal Party. While there have been important regional variations in the insurgence of minor parties, and some states have supported a rural based National Party in coalition with the Liberal Party, contests for the control of national and all state governments in Australia have been fought overwhelmingly on a Labor, Liberal/National divide (Sharman 2003, 241-247).

If the degree of partisan symmetry determines the organizational structure of national parties, Australian national parties should be part of a single centralised party system for most

aspects of party activity, while Canadian national parties should be distanced from their provincial counterparts.

Alternative propositions about national parties

An alternative view is that the organization of national parties in the two parliamentary federations is defined by the interplay of two demands which should produce similar organizational characteristics in both cases, notwithstanding differences in the patterns of provincial and state partisan competition. The first demand is the need to weld party members of the national parliament into a coherent majority to sustain a government; the second is the necessity of winning seats from single member districts spread across the whole federation. The first demand will generate strong parliamentary parties dominated by their leaders; the second makes national parties dependent on coalitions of electoral districts or provincial parties which can organize electoral support for national party candidates.

Both these characteristics spring from the dispersed nature of provincial and state political communities which required the adoption of a federal form of government in the first place. At the electoral district level, this geographical dispersion greatly enhances the importance of local and regional factors in the recruitment of candidates and the mounting of successful national election campaigns.

At the national level, the dictates of parliamentary government require parliamentary parties to weld together members from disparate backgrounds. This coherence can be provided by loyalty to a leader, by brokerage politics, and by a commitment to the collective decisions of the parliamentary party. These factors operate in all parliamentary parties but they are likely to be accentuated in the national parliaments of federations because of the distance between the parliamentary party and the party machine. National party organizations may exist and have considerable formal powers, but there is unlikely to be the intimate relationship between party machine and parliamentary party which has characterized some programmatic parties at provincial and state levels. In addition, the limited impact of federal jurisdictional issues on the day to day lives of citizens, and the need to act in concert with provincial and state government to implement policy goals both limit the ability of national party structures to rival the influence of provincial and state parties immersed in the constant demands of local politics.

This means that national parties in parliamentary federations will be dominated by their parliamentary parties, whatever the constitutional structure of the parties. And for parliamentary federations with lower house representation based on single member districts, the selection of candidates will make national parties dependent on local and regional organizations. The consequence for such national parties whether operating in nominally confederal or integrated party systems is that they are fragile structures in the sense that, outside their parliamentary parties, they have little continuing existence.

The comparisons which follow will show that, in spite of differences in the evolution of national parties in Canada and Australia, the pattern of a dominant parliamentary party coupled with dependence on local or regional coalitions for the recruitment of candidates is common to both.

Liberal Party of Canada

For much of the period since 1867, Canadian national parties have been characterised by strong leaders whose success has depended on their political skills to marshal loose regional coalitions of supporters under their party banner. MacDonald, Borden, Laurier, and King, did not depend on substantial support from any extra-parliamentary organization. Abortive attempts to found such organizations came not from the party leader, but from officials and activists within the party during periods on the opposition benches. The national parties were dominated by the party leader and the caucus while district organizations generally nominated local candidates, although there was wide variation in this practice (Carty 1999, 565). While regional ministers and the party leader exercised an influence over the selection of candidates in certain ridings, the power to do so was not formalized and did not occur regularly. Carty describes the autonomous national-local character of early parties:

> As organizations, the national parties were little more than coteries of political notables. The parliamentary caucus was the party….Despite national rhetoric, party politics focused on the constituency…Local partisan associations and their supporters were linked through their MP, or defeated candidate, to the leadership at the centre (Carty 1999, 565-66).

Carty's description illuminates the absence of any sort of extra-parliamentary organization that might have acted as an intermediary between the national caucus and local associations of Canadian parties.

The Liberal Party had emerged as a parliamentary party by 1867. The organization of the party in this early period was weak and characterized by the dominance of the party leader and the caucus. In this early period, Laurier personified the party in the eyes of the public. With no real national organization, the leader, aided by personal contacts in the provincial and local organizations, toured the country to ensure that quality candidates were selected in each riding. This informal dependence on provincial organizations formed the basis for Laurier's election in 1896. A familiar form of organization soon took root: the 'use of the cabinet as the mode of organizing the country' (Regenstreif 1963, 216). Under this informal organization, national ministers oversaw provincial and local organizations in order to conduct national election campaigns and ensure the selection of suitable candidates. These ministers' access to patronage allowed regional ministers to construct formidable regional and local organizations. If no ministers were available to represent particular provinces or regions, Laurier turned to premiers or provincial ministers to do so. This regionalized, patronage-driven model of party organization, which was driven largely by members of the national cabinet, existed in various forms until after the defeat of the party in the 1957 election.

This is not to say that no attempts were made in the intervening years to develop an autonomous national organization to coordinate the activities of the provincial and local groups. Typically, discussions over such an organization occurred following electoral defeat. Defeat in the 1911 and 1917 elections caused Laurier to involve himself in the development of three extra-parliamentary national organizations: the Central Liberal Information Office, the National Liberal Advisory Committee, and the National Liberal Organization Committee. These organizations were immediately plagued by a lack of funds. They also struggled to reconcile themselves with powerful parliamentary parties and regional and local organizations. The National Advisory Committee, for example, was dominated by MPs while the Central Information Office found it necessary to promise party officials that the office would not 'interfere with, or supersede the work of the local Liberal organizations in the various constituencies or provinces' (Regenstreif 1963, 125). In any case, the party was re-elected in 1921 and quickly reverted to the regionalized and patronage-driven mode of operation.

King's defeat in 1930 prompted the founding of the National Liberal Federation (NLF) in 1932. While out of office, the party fell back on this embryonic organization to coordinate the activities of provincial campaign organizations during the 1935 campaign. When the Liberals won that election, King oversaw a return to the old patronage-driven system. He refined this model, relying on regional ministers and on personal contacts in the provincial parties and government to run national campaigns (Whittaker 1991, 164-165). In contrast, the NLF languished.

The party's defeat in the 1957 election forced the NLF back to a position of prominence and the organization played a more important role in the 1958 national election than it had in the past. However, MPs and the leader's advisors often ignored the NLF over questions of campaign organization and especially on questions of policy. In any case, the party's defeat in that election sparked calls once again for the development of a permanent national organization free of linkages to provincial parties.[2] Reformers within the party were critical of the old regionalized patronage-driven form of organization because it caused the national party to become overly reliant on provincial organizations that were viewed as corrupt and parochial. The reformers instead favoured the development of an exclusively national organization free of linkages to provincial parties that would be capable of conducting truly 'pan-Canadian' national election campaigns (Smith 1981, 52-53). However, it was still not entirely clear what role the NLF and its various components would play following the implementation of these reforms. Furthermore, formal separation of the national and provincial Liberal parties was offset somewhat by informal efforts by national leaders to secure the support of provincial premiers and parties (Clarkson 2005: 41-42).

Periods of sporadic organizational reform have led to the development of two important national organizations, the National Executive and the Council of Presidents. The National Executive oversees the management and finances of the party and, with the consent of the leader, appoints other officials throughout the national organization. The Council of Presidents is staffed by members of the National Executive and, most importantly, by every constituency association president. This means that there are currently 308 association presidents on this Council. While the Council of Presidents has the potential to coordinate national and local activities, in fact it

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[2] In contrast, old party hands maintained that the best way to rebuild the national party was to elect Liberal governments at the provincial level (McCall-Newman 1982, 18).

largely fulfills a review function.[3] The party's biennial conventions are opportunities to elect members of the National Executive and debate and adopt policy resolutions that originate primarily from the constituency associations. But no one is under any illusion that the party leader is bound by these policy resolutions during election campaigns. Instead, biennial conventions are useful for garnering media attention for the party, particularly during the leader's address to the convention.[4]

While the party leader has retained the ability to formulate policy during elections, the party's local organizations have retained the right to nominate individual candidates. In most ridings, the local association oversees nomination contests and the local membership selects the candidate. The new Canada Election Act, however, allows party leaders to de-certify constituency associations (Section 403.02(2)(c)). The new Act also requires all candidates to be endorsed by the party leader (Section 67(4)(c)). These relatively new powers allow the party leader to disallow undesirable candidates or parachute in certain candidates in order to facilitate the election of a high-profile figure or to meet gender quotas. But despite their availability to party leaders, these powers are in fact exercised quite sparingly since leaders are eager to avoid the negative reactions of local activists. Besides these abilities to interfere in the affairs of the local party, the party's National Executive may intervene in local nomination contests by allowing certain candidates to stand despite their not having been party members for the required period. The National Executive may also change the timing of nomination contests to favour certain candidates over others (Liberal Party of Canada 2006, 23(2)).

Since the founding of the Liberal Party in Canada, national extra-parliamentary organizations have struggled to find their place in a party that is characterized on the one hand by a powerful leader and parliamentary party and on the other hand by local parties that are essential to nominating candidates and contesting elections in diverse single-member constituencies.

Conservative Party of Canada

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[3] The party does not assist constituency association presidents financially in order to attend these meetings, meaning that they may be sparsely attended.

[4] Kelly (1989) argues that party conventions may also be useful because they allow the parliamentary party to gauge the feelings of the party membership on a range of issues.

The evolution of the Conservative Party's organization has been similar to that of the Liberal Party but, since 1942, the Conservative Party has developed a more persistent national organization. As we have seen for the Liberals, it is periods in opposition which spur calls for the development of a national organization, and the Conservatives have seen many more of these periods. Another explanation is that the Conservatives have been less successful at the provincial level than has the Liberal Party. Without provincial affiliates to turn to, the Conservative Party was forced to develop a national organization free of the regionalized and patronage-driven arrangements that characterized the Liberal organization until the 1950s. But it is important not to overstate the importance of the Conservative national organization.

Under MacDonald, the organization was strikingly similar to the organization of the Liberal Party under Laurier. MacDonald personified the party in the eyes of the public. He maintained a loose control over the party by means of a vast number of personal contacts with officials in provincial parties and important local notables in the ridings. Without MacDonald's electoral appeal, however, the party struggled to develop an organization that would lend continuity to the party during periods out of office (English 1993, 31-32). Borden responded to this challenge by building informal linkages with the organizations of provincial parties (English 1993, 45-52).

A familiar pattern soon set in as new extra-parliamentary organizations formed, struggled to find a role in the party, and quickly fell into disuse. The Liberal-Conservative Association of Canada was created in 1924. This group had few powers and was run largely by the efforts of a single party official. In 1938, a meeting of the party approved a resolution to create the National Conservative Council, but the Council never met. As Williams succinctly notes, '…attempts to reorganize the party had been attempted, but all had failed' (Williams 1999, 194).

It was only in 1942 that a party convention approved the creation of the Dominion Progressive Conservative Association. Spurred by defeat, the Association maintained a national office, held conventions, and attempted to coordinate the activities of the regional parties. The party also oversaw provincial officers in the provinces who attempted to oversee the activities of local Conservative organizations in each riding. The success of these officers and local associations, however, was a reflection of the competitiveness of the provincial Conservative parties. Where the provincial party was weak or non-existent, such as in Alberta, the position of

provincial officer was only an honorary position. Local constituency associations in these provinces were staffed by a few local notables but were never competitive in election campaigns.

While the Association did develop policy, this was hardly binding on the national party. MPs from caucus committees were appointed to the Association, from where they worked to ensure that policy resolutions were acceptable to the parliamentary party and especially the leader. In 1947, the Association made clear that any policy resolutions adopted would not be binding on the party. Indeed, these resolutions '…would be of value only because of the suggestions which were to be considered by the leader and the caucus' (Williams 1999, 196). This situation persisted into the 1970s, when a party newsletter reported that delegates to the party convention 'were invited to vote on some 350 resolutions *that will act as a guide to the leader* in the exposition of where the Progressive Conservative Party stands on what' (quoted in Perlin 1980, 15, emphasis is Perlin's). Clearly, this was a national extra-parliamentary organization that was subordinate to the leader and the parliamentary party.

The continuing weakness of the party's extra-parliamentary organization was accompanied by a decline in formal linkages between the national party and its provincial affiliates. Given that the Conservatives have been less successful at the provincial level than have the Liberals, the national Conservative Party has never been as dependent on its provincial affiliates. As a result, disentanglement of the national and provincial organizations was accompanied by formal separation of the national and provincial parties in Quebec in 1964, Ontario in 1976, and Alberta in 1977 (Smiley 1987,111).

Such formal disentanglement, however, did not rule out informal electoral cooperation between national and provincial Conservative parties, cooperation that resulted almost solely from informal negotiations between national and provincial party leaders (Esselment 2007, 4-6). Such informal working relationships allowed national leaders to cope with organizational weakness by relying on provincial affiliates; Diefenbaker turned to Quebec premier Maurice Duplessis to provide organizational support in that province (McCall-Newman 1982, 276). But these informal relationships between national and provincial party leaders also made it unclear what role the national extra-parliamentary organization should play, particularly during election campaigns.

The 1993 national election saw the old party fractured into the Progressive Conservative Party and the Reform Party. The Reform Party subsequently was transformed into the Canadian Alliance in 2000. The Progressive Conservative Party and the Canadian Alliance were reunited in

2004, but the election of Stephen Harper as leader meant that the party's organization was largely drawn from the Canadian Alliance wing of the party and would be strongly focused on supporting Harper as leader (Flanagan 2007, chapter 5).

The Conservative Party's National Council now dominates the party's current national organization. The Council contains eleven party members who are elected at national conventions as well as the leader, the chair of the party's fundraising apparatus, and the party's executive director. Notably, while the leader must sit on the council, MPs are prohibited from doing so (Conservative Party of Canada 2005, 8.1). The Council's most important powers relate to local constituency associations and nominations; the Council must formally recognize constituency associations, must approve potential nomination candidates, and has the power to oversee local candidate selection processes (Conservative Party of Canada 2005, 8.6.1-2).

The leader of the party, under the *Canada Elections Act*, may refuse to sign the nomination papers of candidates (Section 67(4)(c)). Harper has been willing to exercise this power but in fact has done so quite sparingly and it remains largely the responsibility of local constituency associations to select candidates. Thus, while the power of the leader appears to have expanded significantly relative to the local organizations, in reality the local associations are still largely free to select candidates.

One reason that Canadian party leaders do not disallow local candidates too often, their power to do so under the Canada Election Act notwithstanding, is because doing so invites strong criticism from local activists (Carty 2004, 14). Within a local context where exit trumps voice, activists are likely to abandon the local campaign rather than abide by any appointed candidate. The Conservative National Executive therefore tends to respond to local criticism by deflecting this criticism from Harper. Where candidates have been disallowed, it has been the president of the Council and the party's executive director, not Harper, who have generally taken responsibility for disallowed candidates when members of the local organizations protest. In a telling statement following the disallowing of a particular nomination candidate, the party's president, Don Plett, informed the media that, 'There are always opportunists that believe that if they can win a nomination race, it gives them the opportunity to become a Member of Parliament' (CBC News 2007). Plett's statement served to remind local organizations that the Conservative National Council has the power, even if rarely used, to override the choice of a local candidate if such a choice interferes with the national campaign strategy.

Both the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party of Canada conform to the model of an organization dominated by its parliamentary leadership, supported by a network of local organizations responsible for selecting candidates. Neither party has much in the way of an autonomous party machine responsible for steering the party and making key choices about party structure. Australian parties have acquired such organizations but the dynamics of national party operation are similar to those of their Canadian cousins.

Liberal Party of Australia

The Australian Liberal Party, in spite of its reorganizations and name changes, has a history which is not too different from Canadian national parties. At federation in 1901, Australia was in the throes of moving from a system of parliamentary politics where governments were supported by shifting coalitions of ministerialists, to one where governments could rely on parliamentary majorities stabilized by party discipline. By 1910, the success of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in national politics with its pledge-bound candidates and parliamentary majority had prompted the fusion of anti-Labor parties to form the Liberal Party. These parties had had almost no continuing organization outside the need to mobilize support for elections:

> '*Ad hoc* central committees were set up a few months before an election to marshal the necessary resources. The federal leaders toured the states to set their local followings in motion but made little or no attempt to coordinate their activity. In each instance they were dependent upon men more or less deeply engaged in state as well as federal politics and on organisations which they had neither created not controlled.' (Loveday 1977: 451)

After 1910, a framework was established for consultation between state Liberal parties which was based on sporadic meetings of a federal conference and federal executive with equal state representation, with provision for a secretariat. But these arrangements had hardly any impact on the state-based organization of national politics.

This pattern persisted during the two major realignments in anti-Labor politics which followed the First World War and the onset of the Depression and kept the ALP out of national office for all but three years between 1917 and 1941. In 1917, Liberal parliamentarians supported an ALP prime minister, Hughes, who defected from his party over the issue of conscription to form a new anti-Labor party, the Nationalists, which held office from 1917 to 1929. Returning to power in 1929 in time for the turbulent politics of the Depression, an ALP government under

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Scullin again suffered crippling defections from the parliamentary party, this time over economic policy. In 1931, a former ALP federal minister, Lyons, became the leader of a populist inspired United Australia Party (UAP) which defeated the ALP in a landslide victory. The UAP held office, either alone or in coalition with the Country Party from 1931 to 1941.

Electoral success in national politics was not matched by the creation of any extensive national party organization. The Nationalists followed the federally organized party structure adopted by the Liberal Party after 1910. Despite its limitations, this arrangement gave the Nationalists, '...the semblance of a national administrative and coordinating institution.' (Lloyd 2001, 157), but there was no suggestion that these bodies had any part to play in the selection of candidates and only the most limited role in the formation of party policy. The organization of national election campaigns remained a state party concern, with some assistance from the leader and his team in framing campaign themes and raising funds.

In the turmoil of Depression politics, the UAP was the successor to the Nationalist party apparatus, but the populist groups and business interests which had played an active part in the formation of the UAP were not easily accommodated within the party. Lloyd (2001) argues that the UAP had almost no national party structure outside the parliamentary party and a small federal secretariat, its electoral success being largely dependent on the continuing disarray of the ALP and the campaigning skills of Lyons until his death in 1939. Three state parties chose not to adopt the UAP party name; this foreshadowed the fate of the UAP which fell apart at the federal level after losing office in 1941 amid personal and factional disputes, interest group rivalries, and disarray over the organization of government during wartime (Hancock 2000, 10-23).

By 1945, the anti-Labor groups and parties which had sprung up with the collapse of the UAP formed a new party, the Liberal Party, under the leadership of Menzies. Both the goals and the organization of the new Liberal Party differed from its predecessors (see generally Hancock 2000; Martin 1999, 1-29). While critical of the Labor Party government's centralizing plans for postwar reconstruction and hostile to the socialist aims of some members of the Labor Party, the Liberals accepted an interventionist role for government in both the economy and in the provision of social welfare. Menzies, who had bitter memories of the influence of business interests within the UAP, was keen to establish a party which had a nation-wide organization with a broadly based membership, and which had funding arrangements that insulated it from the demands of a few large donors.

The structure of the new party was strictly federal with equal representation for each state on a Federal Council and a Federal Executive. In spite of procedures for discussing policy, the parliamentary leader of the party retained the final say on policy questions. At the grass roots, efforts were made to attract a wide membership with an extensive network of paid[5] and voluntary workers, but these arrangements were under the control of the state divisions of the party, as was the responsibility for the endorsement of candidates for national elections.[6] Each state division was solely responsible for the conduct of state party matters and there was no power for the national party to intervene even in matters which directly affected the success of the national party. This did not prevent state divisions from exchanging personnel or seeking advice, expertise and resources from the federal secretariat.

The Liberal Party won national office in 1949 and was in government for over forty of the succeeding fifty-eight years until the Howard government's defeat in 2007 (1949-1972, 1975-1983, 1996-2007). Its party structure has remained substantially unchanged over this period (Liberal Party of Australia 1999) although, after each loss of office there has been a major review of the party organization and pressures for the national party to adopt a less federal and more national structure.[7] The lack of change in the basic structure of the party since 1945 has not prevented major changes in the growth and professionalization of its national organs; national party politics has become more bureaucratized and more dependent on the services of campaign and public opinion specialists, media experts and fundraising professionals. But the dynamics of the national party have remained unchanged; the party is dominated by the parliamentary party and its leader whose main concern was the need to win national elections; the selection of candidates and the grass roots contact between the party and voters remains a matter for the state divisions, notwithstanding campaigning advice and information from the party's databases produced by the national office.

Australian Labor Party

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[5]   For a personal account of a Liberal Party organizer in the 1950s, see Davis (1966, 8-13).

[6]   'From 1945 the State councils had passed, amended or rescinded motions on pre-selection procedures. In 1965 they were still divided over the issues of whether branch members, electoral committees or State executives should have the greater say. But at least they agreed on one point: pre-selection was no business of the Federal Executive.' (Hancock 2000, 248).

[7]   For example, the review by Valder (1983). A similar review is being undertaken as result of the 2007 defeat, with suggestions of enhanced power for the leader to review candidate selections; see Salusinszky, 'Nelson power to veto factional 'hacks'' *The Australian*, 11 March 2008.

The current Australian Labor Party (ALP) looks the ideal candidate for a highly integrated party dominated by a national machine. The national party can intervene in all aspects of the party's operation, state and national, from setting policy goals for the party and disaffiliating state branches, to overturning delegate selection processes and expelling members from the party. It looks as though its organization contradicts the assertions of this paper about national parties in parliamentary federations, and has little in common with Canadian national parties. But, it will be argued that the way the party operates—as opposed to its nominal structure—shows the same parliamentary and leadership dominance coupled with regional dependence for candidate selection as other national parties in Canada and Australia.

The ALP emerged as a union based, social democratic mass party in the 1890s. Its success in colonial (state) politics in the years leading up to federation in 1901 made many in the party suspicious of federation as a device to check the growing influence of the ALP at state level. But, by 1910, the party achieved majority government and control of both houses in the new Commonwealth Parliament, an electoral success which reinforced a major realignment of the anti-Labor parties in national politics. While the ALP has been in national office for only a third of the period since federation, the party has usually had the largest vote share of any party at national elections since 1910 and, in spite of periods of turmoil, has formed the government or the alternative government in national politics ever since.

The ALP at state level has been characterized by a strong commitment to rank and file control of party platforms and policies, the participation of delegates from affiliated unions in the decisions of the party, the election of party officials, and the requirement that ALP candidates, if elected, are pledged to follow the party platform and the decisions of the parliamentary party (caucus). After federation, the party established a Federal Conference in 1902, and a Federal Executive in 1915 (see generally Crisp 1949). But these federal bodies did not replicate the close relationship between the state party machines and state parliamentary parties; they had no direct link to the membership of the party or its affiliated unions. The Federal Conference met every two or three years, and the Federal Executive twice a year; the federal party had no full-time secretary until 1949, and no permanent secretariat until 1973. Candidates for federal elections were chosen by the state parties and federal election campaigns were largely the responsibility of state organizations. Until 1967, the federal bodies were composed of delegates chosen by the state ALP

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parties—six delegates from each state to the Federal Conference, and two to the Federal Executive—who were bound to vote on most issue as instructed by their state parties. Decisions of the national party on policy and the party platform were made by coalitions of state party factions.

Until the 1970s, the only continuing manifestation of the ALP in national politics was the federal caucus—the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party (FPLP)—and its leader who was chosen by caucus. The lack of an established party machine at the national level enhanced the discretion of the parliamentary leadership and gave the FPLP considerable authority over the party's stance on national issues even though the Federal Conference was responsible for framing the party's platform.

Notwithstanding the sporadic existence of the Federal Conference and Executive, these bodies were granted the power to intervene in state branches of the party, override their decisions, and even to dissolve a state branch of the ALP and create a new one. These powers were acquired as a consequence of major splits within the party, the most important being the split over conscription in 1916-1917, the series of interventions into the rebel New South Wales branch to set up new state executives over the period from 1927 to 1941, and the split in 1955 which led to the creation of the breakaway Democratic Labor Party. But these draconian powers could only be used if a majority of state delegates were willing to support intervention against another state branch.

Changes to the Federal Conference in 1967 heralded a period of organizational change in the party which came to a head in 1981. A series of electoral defeats at the federal elections of 1975, 1977 and 1980 helped to precipitate a major restructuring of the national organization. The federal basis for state representation in the structure of a new National Conference was maintained, but matched by an equal number of delegates selected in proportion to the number of seats from each state in the House of Representatives, increasing the voting weight of the larger states. This nationalizing process has continued so that, by 1994, the National Executive of the party was elected from the floor of the National Conference rather than by state branches, and by 2007 representation was broadened to that the triennial National Conference was increased in size to 400 delegates.

How significant are the changes? The National Executive has been much more assertive and has used its powers vigorously to intervene in state branches on a range of procedural issues.

But its interventions are sporadic and the dominant criterion for intervention has been actions by state branches which are seen to prejudice the electoral success of the party at national elections. The administrative machinery of the party in Canberra has grown a great deal, but its goal has been to further the goals of the party as articulated by the parliamentary leadership and has been driven by the need for electoral success and the complexities of media management in national campaigns. The National Conference has grown, but it has become a media event where factions in the party fight over the wording of a national platform which may have little bearing on the electoral strategy of the national leadership.

Even though no longer based on equal state representation, National Conference delegates are chosen by a state based process, much to the dismay of those in the party who have pressed for a 'national' party (Encel 2005). As an observer noted about the 1994 enlargement of the National Conference:

> 'These relics of federalism could only have been eliminated by a total transformation of the party structure; for example, electing its national institutions by national plebiscites of party members, or replacing the Conference with some form of mass political convention. Such structures, of course, were alien to ALP traditions.' (Lloyd 2000: 70)

Selection of the leader of the party remains the prerogative of the national caucus, and the recruitment of candidates for the House of Representatives is still a matter for the state branches of the party, even if the national party provides guidelines as to how candidates are to be selected, and goals for gender balance. On occasion, the national party may wish to parachute a high profile recruit into a safe Labor seat[8] or scramble to pick the best candidate for a national by-election,[9] but it can do this only with difficulty and with the acquiescence of the relevant state executive. And the centre of gravity for factional activity and union affiliation continues to be firmly based in the six state and two territory branches of the party, as is the machinery for rank and file membership.[10]

In spite of its having an impressively centralized constitutional structure, the ALP conforms to the same dynamics as other national parties in federations—it is dominated by its

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[8]   For example, a former singer and head of the Australian Conservation Foundation, recruited as a star candidate, 'Garrett goes on Record for Labor', *Australian Financial Review*, 10 June 2004.

[9]   See 'Gippsland ALP Shift', *The Australian*, 18 April 2008.

[10]   'Unless there is a national event of unchallengeable significance on the horizon—a Federal election, a National Conference, a meeting of the National Executive—it is not easy for the state parties to switch their emphasis to Federal politics. They prefer the exhilaration of State factional politics where the demands are incessant and often frantic.' (Lloyd 1983: 230)

parliamentary leadership and dependent on subnational associations for the bulk of party machine functions including the key tasks of candidate recruitment and electioneering in single member electoral districts.

Discussion

Political scientists since Riker (1964) have paid increasing attention to the role that political parties play in the operation of federations. Models that note the presence of parties of the same name at the national and state or provincial levels often assume the existence of an integrated party organized in a hierarchical manner, with the sub-national parties subordinate to the national party. This is particularly the case with mass parties like the Australian Labor Party where the formal structure of the party suggests that the national extra-parliamentary organization is very powerful and plays a dominant role at every level in the federation.

But federations, in their nature, are responses to the dispersal of political communities, and the persistence of regional politics in spite of the importance of a national government. Those parliamentary federations using single member districts to elect national governments both reinforce the importance of local politics and inject into national politics an acute awareness of the importance of regional support for national electoral success. National parties in these systems have to accommodate the necessity for local responsiveness at election time even though their principal focus is on the parliamentary contest in the national capital. These parties have little use for a traditional party machine.

Our examination of Canadian and Australian parties shows that the national extra-parliamentary organizations are truncated and often struggle to find a role within the party. This is particularly the case when parties are in power. The impulse to develop a strong and continuing extra-parliamentary organization appears when parties are defeated and especially when they languish on the opposition benches for several electoral cycles. In Canada, the Conservative Party developed a more persistent national organization earlier than the Liberal Party partially because of the long periods they spent out of power in the first half of the 20th century.

Only following the Liberals' landslide defeat in the 1957 national election that a significant extra-parliamentary organization developed. In Australia, only with the splintering of the national anti-Labor parties in the 1940s did the Liberal Party create an extensive party structure, and each subsequent defeat has sparked discussion the party's national organization. The growth in authority of the ALP national organization was also prompted by a history of party splits, disastrous defeats and periods of electoral failure at the national level. The powers of the national extra-parliamentary organizations that have resulted from these processes of reform and reorganization have served, in practice, only to enhance the power of the national parliamentary leadership and its control over the procedures for winning national elections.

Table 1:
Growth of national party organization in parliamentary federations
using single member district electoral systems

	Phase 1:	Phase 2:	Phase 3:
National party coordination	• Leader/Caucus	• Leader/Caucus • Occasional meetings of national organization for policy discussion and administrative coordination	• Leader/Caucus • Occasional meetings of national organization for policy discussion, administrative coordination, and leadership selection (Canada only) • Permanent secretariat responsible to party leadership, focused on media management and national elections
Candidate selection process	• Electoral district organization	• Electoral district organization with state/provincial override	• Electoral district and/or state/provincial organization with national organization or leader override

Table 1 shows how the key components of national party structure—national party coordination and the candidate selection process—have not altered but the organizational form has changed in response to the changing nature of elections and the scope of campaigning. Not all parties have gone through all phases, but the gradient is similar for all parties. National party organization in all phases is characterized by strong parliamentary leadership, but this is steadily supplemented by additional executive support. No matter how impressive the organizational machinery—and in the case of the ALP it is very impressive—the critical elements of national party coordination remain with the parliamentary leader.

At the local level in all phases, the major actor in national candidate selection and local campaigning remains the local district organization. Phase two applies only to Australia, as it has never been the role of provincial parties in Canada to set up machinery for the selection of national candidates. In the Australian case, for both major parties, local selection of candidates becomes overlaid by an increasing involvement of the state party machine . In phase three—which has not yet arrived for the Liberal Party of Australia—there is machinery for the national party or leader to override local candidate selection, but in all cases, the use of this power is exceptional. In Canada, it is the leader who has the right under the Canada Election Act to disallow candidates, and the national extra-parliamentary organization provides support for the leader to do so. Any perceived increase in the power of the national extra-parliamentary organization may in fact conceal the increased power of the leader relative to the local organizations. But the effect is the same; in both systems, there is increasing stress on the ability of the national leadership to respond to any event which threatens national electoral success.

For both systems, the way in which national parties have operated has been remarkably stable for over more than a century—it appears that the dynamics of parliamentary politics coupled with single member electoral districts provide powerful constraints on the shape of party organization.[11]

These similar patterns in the operation of national parties in the Canadian and Australian federations suggest that the distinction between integrated and confederal party systems is not as helpful as might first appear. This is not to deny that party symmetry between national and provincial or state electoral contests is an important factor in understanding how politics operates

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[11]   This is a matter that those arguing for electoral reform for the Canadian House of Commons should consider; MMP with provincial party lists, for example, might generate quite different candidate selection procedures that those used under the present SMP system.

in a federation, but that parties may be shaped by factors in addition to the way they compete in the multiple forums provided by a federal system. In the parliamentary federations examined in this paper, similar parliamentary and electoral processes have generated national parties which operate in a similar fashion even though Canadian provincial parties are more varied and than Australian state parties, and the Canadian federal system is, by many measures, more decentralized than the Australian. These differences have not prevented a party as rule-bound and formally centralized as the Australian Labor Party from operating in practice at the national level in much the same way as Canadian national parties.

National parties lack the direct and continuous link with day to day politics at the local level and, to this extent are epiphytes on regional politics—they depend on local politics for their existence but their political life is elsewhere. This may be much less true in federal systems using proportional representation where national party machines can be directly involved with local politics. But the aim of this paper is not to provide a categorization for all national parties in federations, just to suggest that their nature is more elusive than some of the literature suggests, and as much dependent on the politics of representation as it is on the politics of federalism.

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