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Irish Clientelism: A Reappraisal

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Abstract: Studies of Irish politics have generally used a clientelist framework: voters in rural areas seem to obtain state benefits through a politician's interventions and, in return, become the politician's "clients". This article reports anthropological research on urban brokerage and clientelism carried out in Dublin from 1978 to 1981 which suggests that a more complex analytic model is required. Clientelism was relevant in the context of party politics, but voters who sought a broker's help did not necessarily become clients. Political brokerage did not guarantee individual voters' electoral support, and was largely used to enhance the politician's reputation in the community. It is thus useful to distinguish brokerage from clientelism; although the two are related, they are not interchangeable. In addition, the "currency" of brokerage was rarely politicians' influence over the actual allocation of state resources, but rather their information about bureaucratic procedures and their access to the bureaucrats themselves. There is no reason to presume that brokerage, based on such a monopoly over information and access, should necessarily decrease as Ireland becomes increasingly urban and industrial.

I INTRODUCTION

The political broker who intervenes on behalf of constituents to help them obtain government benefits and the client who rewards the politician with his vote has become an acceptable, and even fashionable, model of Irish political life. Since Chubb (1963) revealed that TDs "per-

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secuted civil servants", studies in different parts of Ireland have described clientelist politics (e.g., Bax, 1976; Carty, 1981; Sacks, 1976). In such studies, politicians assist voters and, in return, voters become their devoted clients. Elections, in this view, become occasions for voter/clients to repay debts to their politician/brokers.

Such descriptions make Irish politics simply another manifestation of clientelist politics generally. In countries dominated by clientelism (usually in peripheral or underdeveloped regions), personal and familial bonds determine voting patterns, state resources are allocated on the basis of personalistic rather than universalistic criteria, and both government and party policy are dictated by personal commitments to supporters (see Schmidt *et al.*, 1977). There is often an implicit suggestion that such clientelist political systems are linked with traditional societies or underdeveloped economies, and clientelism will cease to exist in modern and industrialised societies.

The Irish studies, carried out within this framework, have been broadly accepted as accurate, but have been criticised for their implicit assumptions.[1] My research in Dublin suggests that Irish studies have had limited impact because they have been overly vague: definitions have owed more to "native" folk beliefs than analytic utility. I found that the basic issue was not, as is often assumed, politician's control, or claimed control, over the allocation of state resources (such as housing grants, medical cards and so forth). Dublin politicians' claim to power or influence rested on their ability to monpolise and then market their specialist knowledge of state resources and their access to bureaucrats who allocated such resources. Such special "influence" did not create the committed political followers that is a characteristic of clientelist politics. While such clientelistic links dominated party politics, they did not extend very far into the wider community. Although voters benefited from using politicians as brokers, they could not be compelled to become the politician's "clients". Politicians used their special access and knowledge to create a reputation in the community, and hoped that citizens would, out of moral obligation, reward them with votes. Such different types of voter-politician interactions were not easily accommodated

1 It has been argued, in Ireland and elsewhere, that researchers have sometimes explained brokerage by reference to "political culture", but then treated "political culture" as an unproblematic given. Other researchers have linked brokerage with underdevelopment; to be "cured" by modernisation. In Irish studies, social and economic distinctions among clients are often ignored, and a rural/traditional versus urban/modern dichotomy is presumed. Such studies may mask political and economic inequalities, while presuming a functionalist consensus.

Steffan Schmidt *et al.* (1977) is a useful collection of the seminal articles on political clientelism, as well as Gellner and Waterbury (1977) and Eisenstadt and Lemarchand (1981). For general criticisms of brokerage and clientelism studies, see Gilsenan (1977), Sylverman (1977), Weingrod (1977b), and Paine (1974). For criticisms of Irish studies, see especially O'Connell (1982), Garvin (1982) and Higgins (1982), as well as Gibbon and Higgins (1974), O'Dowd (1978), Ruane (1979) and Roche (1982).

by existing models of Irish politics, based on vague assumptions of "clientelism". An analytic definition of brokerage based on restricted access to scarce (and not necessarily material) resources, and described in social network terms,[2] provided a useful framework for the analysis of Dublin politics. Thus, a brief examination of brokerage and clientelism must precede a discussion of existing Irish studies and then an elaboration of the Dublin material.

Brokerage and Clientelism

Clientelism studies developed out of earlier patronage studies. Patron-client studies described non-kin links in kinship-based societies, and distinguished horizontal exchanges between "equals" from vertical exchanges between "unequals" (Foster, 1961). The vertical exchanges fulfilled crucial economic functions, although they were overlaid with imputed moral qualities such as kinship or friendship. These moral qualities disguised the inequality which created the need for such exchanges. Brokerage models developed as anthropologists turned from local communities to the wider systems of which the communities were a part (Schmidt *et al.*, 1977). There was often a "gap" between local and national systems, and locals needed assistance in dealing with the broader system. Some individuals, due to their social, economic, or political position, were able to bridge this gap. These middle-men were providing services which were under someone else's control and were thus brokers rather than patrons (Paine, 1971; Sylverman, 1965). Brokers monopolised, and also restricted, access to the scarce resources provided by outsiders (such as state agencies). It was a relation of inequality, as the client was more dependent on the services offered by the broker than the reverse. The client's vulnerability gave the broker the power to define the terms of the exchange (Paine, 1974), despite the appearance of free choice.

Some writers, in applying brokerage to state societies, have tended to emphasise the groups receiving the benefits of brokerage. Political parties, machines, and "vote banks" (e.g., Scott, 1972) became the arena for clientism, and the personal exchanges between broker and client were subsumed within this larger arena. Since the allocation of public goods is an important resource in state systems, studies focused on the personal advantage gained from the control of such allocations. Thus, political scientists tended to study "how political party leaders seek to turn public institutions and public resources to their own ends, and how favors of various kinds are exchanged for votes" (Weingrod, 1977a, p. 379). The emphasis on entire groups involved

2 Some writers have suggested a "theory" of network analysis; I use it here only as a useful method of collecting and analysing data (see Barnes, 1972; Boissevain and Mitchell, 1973; and Mitchell, 1974).

in clientelist exchanges suggests a "mass clientelism" (Graziano, 1975) in which none escape involvement.

Ambiguities have developed in these concepts as they have been applied to a wide variety of situations, and clarification has become necessary. Following a common trend, one writer emphasised that studies should "understand clientelist behaviour not as a characteristic of particular cultures . . . but rather as a form of behaviour which it becomes rational for people to pursue, given specified external conditions" (Clapham, 1982, p. 3). In providing such an analysis, he noted that, in societies which are described as clientelist, "clientelist links are fairly widespread, are responsible for a substantial proportion of total allocations of goods and services, and are interlinked with one another" (Clapham, 1982, p. 7). Other writers mention similar features as well (e.g., Lemarchand, 1981; Eisenstadt and Roniger, 1981; and Powell, 1977). While these attributes are not argued to be causes of clientelism, most studies agree that the attributes are found in connection with it. To describe a political system as clientelistic is to imply persistent and diffuse relations of exchange in a closed system where all participants are either leaders or followers, and never simply uninvolved. However, such behaviours may be found in urban political machines, modernising post-colonial states, or agrarian communities, and yet only constitute an encapsulated segment within a larger non-clientelist political system (c.f., Bailey, 1969). Clientelism would not be said to be dominant in systems where only a small number of people are involved in clientelism, nor would it be said to exist if the politician provided brokerage services without creating enduring moral or instrumental bonds between himself and the "client" as a result.

Although brokerage and clientelism can be distinguished analytically, clientelism studies rarely do so, and the terms are often used interchangeably. None the less, the distinction between brokerage and clientelism is useful. Brokerage is the basis of clientelist links, and clientelistic links are the building blocks of a clientelist system, but brokerage alone does not create clientelist politics. Brokerage exists when there are individuals who function as middle-men or intermediaries. People who go to brokers do not necessarily or inevitably become clients, unless that first interaction is the beginning of a relationship of exchange which becomes imbued with moral qualities.[3] Clientelist links do not necessarily imply clientelist politics, unless such links dominate the entire political system. The presence of brokerage is not, of

3 Such an exchange might have few visible manifestations, and yet still be "persistent and recurrent". For example, a client may be forever indebted by virtue of a service once rendered by a patron/broker which he has never had the opportunity to repay. As long as both parties remain aware of the debt, the link continues to exist (c.f., Bailey (1969) on moral versus transactional exchanges, and Sahlins (1965) on generalised reciprocity).

itself, sufficient to demonstrate "clientelist politics".

Confusion over the use of these terms has limited the utility of clientelism studies of Irish politics. In Ireland, clientelism is important in the context of party politics, but most citizens do not have the continuing links with politicians which clientelist politics involve. Such citizens do, however, engage in brokerage, and they do so precisely because it achieves results. The politician provides both information and access which citizens are denied, but he cannot depend on the clientelistic rewards of votes or personal assistance. Commonly, the politician's reward is a more diffuse, and more temporary, community reputation for concern and activity. Rarely does brokerage actually provide undeserved benefits; usually it ensures the provision of services which would otherwise have been long delayed. Those few areas in which political influence was able to deliver undeserved state benefits were usually used to reward personal supporters who had been active either in party politics or electoral campaigns.

II CLIENTELISM IN RURAL IRELAND

A vague clientelism model has found great currency in Irish political studies. In 1963, Chubb described politicians as local men who looked after their constituent's interests by "going about persecuting civil servants". The politician was primarily a broker, mediating between his local area and the state. Voters wanted state services, and politicians had to help, or appear to help, people obtain those services. Chubb explained brokerage by reference to voters' beliefs. Voters presumed that the "intervention or good offices of a 'man in the know'" (p. 273) was needed to obtain state services; a belief resulting from rural personality and historical experience (c.f., O'Connell, 1982). Chubb presumed that this belief was mistaken; people did not need politicians to get state services, and politicians exaggerated their influence to make themselves appear more instrumental or crucial than they actually were.

After Chubb's work came a number of studies based in various rural constituencies throughout Ireland. The fullest descriptions have come from Bax's study in a Cork constituency and Sacks' study in Donegal, both done in the late 1960s. Their studies emphasised the personal contacts of politicians and their manipulation of clients during factional conflicts, as well as the diffuse economic and moral bonds between patron/broker and client. The descriptions are reminiscent of patronage studies in other societies (e.g., Barth, 1965; Bailey, 1969).

Bax pointed out that competition was intra-party rather than inter-party and, since party rivals were bound by the same policies and ideology, they competed by "building up a greater reputation as a worker for the electorate"

(1975, p. 12). Politicians had numerous ways to influence local and national bureaucrats, and were always using such contacts to build up clienteles among voters. Everyone had a vote, and would use it to reward those politicians who "had pull". Bax argued that brokerage would not necessarily decline as the state expanded. People might still prefer personalised contacts over bureaucratic ones, and, due to "the strong particularism and parochialism of politicians, bureaucrats, and voters" (1976, p. 194), brokerage would continue.

Sacks' discussion of "machine politics" in Donegal was similar: "The countryman, coming out of a small community, places a strong value upon face-to-face relations with people, and [the politician is] the countryman's personal emissary to an anonymous state" (1976, pp. 50-51). However, he considered politicians' claims of effective intervention to be imaginary patronage because ". . . the parties' real control over the distributive institution is quite limited" (1976, p. 7). None the less, the politician claimed influence, and so a transactional link was created: ". . . the politician will utilize [or appear to utilize] his influence in return for support come election day" (1976, p. 52).

In both descriptions of rural politics, it seemed that the arena of clientelism was the entire electorate. All voters were actually, or potentially, some politician's clients. As clients, they were bound, morally or instrumentally, to the politician and would act on the politician's behalf in return for actual or supposed benefits. There is little, if any, discussion of voters who do not participate in such exchanges and it would seem that no one is exempt from being drawn in to the clientelist net.

There is no dispute about the picture of politicians vying with one another to create followings, often by taking credit for influence they do not have and by de-emphasising the rights to state services which the voters have. There is great doubt, however, about the actual amount of influence which politicians have over state allocations. Sacks suggests that politicians are fooling voters by taking undeserved credit for imaginary patronage. But Bax suggests that politicians are actually using personal contacts to obtain services. This conflict between brokerage based on illusion and manipulation of the voters versus brokerage based on influence and manipulation of personal contacts simply underlines the ambiguity of clientelism studies. In order to understand why clientelism exists and what effect it has on both government and administration in Ireland, we must know what is actually involved.

Second, most Irish studies have had a rural context. This seems to suggest that clientelism coincides with a rural world-view out of step with the modern state. Into the gap between peasant culture and modern bureaucracy leaps the political broker. Presumably, brokerage should decline in urban

areas as the politician's monopoly over access is broken. Research in urban areas, like Dublin, would provide a useful test of such assumptions. The common image of Dublin as composed of rural workers who have come to the city (bringing rural attitudes with them) is not supported by the available data. Only a portion of middle-class office workers actually come from rural areas, and the working-class population is native to Dublin (see Hutchinson, 1969; Rottman and O'Connell, 1982). If brokerage and clientelism exists in Dublin, then the cause is more complex than previous studies would have suggested.

Finally, how all inclusive is clientelism? Must all voters be someone's clients? Political folklore abounds with cautionary tales about the fate of politicians who do not look after constituents, and surveys agree that voters believe that politicians can help obtain services and vote on the basis of constituency service.[4] It does not follow, however, that clientelist ties necessarily pervade constituencies. Must all voters be involved in relations of exchange with brokers or broker's brokers? Do all voters who use politicians as brokers therefore become clients? If not, then why are only some voters also clients?

There are thus three issues which need further discussion. Is clientelism pervasive or restricted? Is influence peddling real or imaginary? Is brokerage linked only with rural Ireland and rural values, or, if also found in urban areas, must it be a consequence of something else?

III A STUDY IN DUBLIN

My anthropological fieldwork on brokerage and clientelism was carried out in Dublin from 1978 to 1981. Although not explicitly a "community study", much time was spent in two particular locales: one dominated by local authority housing and the other by privately owned estates. Data collection was based on extended interviews with politicians, party activists, and officials as well as observation of party meetings, politicians' clinics and local authority meetings.[5]

4 For example, an Irish Marketing Surveys poll, commissioned by RTE prior to the 1977 general election, found that 48 per cent of respondents would go to a politician in order to be sure of getting "something from the government", while only 22 per cent would go to the particular department concerned (Sinnott, 1977).

5 See Bannon *et al.* (1981) for a recent study of Dublin's social geography. Since the research required information which would be available only on the basis of trust developed over a long period of time, survey methods would not have yielded the necessary data. The intense factional conflicts in many constituencies made the necessary personal contacts difficult to create and maintain, since to be trusted by one politician was sufficient reason to be distrusted by others. Sufficient personal contacts were eventually made, across party lines, to collect information on most of the relevant issues.

Clientelism

Political life in Dublin was characterised by factional conflict and brokerage – a picture of Irish politics very similar to that painted by Bax, Sacks, Carty and others (e.g., Garvin, 1974; Higgins, 1982). Intra-party rivalries dominated party politics, as politicians manipulated the party structure to maintain their own position. They planted personal followers in local branches and kept ambitious rivals from being nominated for elections. One activist characterised politicians as "professional paranoids", except that the paranoia was often justified. In the public arena, politicians attended funerals, contributed to worthy causes, participated in community activities and held clinics. When not holding clinics, politicians could be reached by phone or mail and might be visited at their house. They were always available, to "get" houses, medical cards, or jobs. Leaflets and public notices made people aware of how much they owed to the work of their politicians and how available their politicians were.

Politicians and activists, however, had an exaggerated view of their own importance. Their activities were of vital concern to themselves, but not to the broader community. The public, supposedly enmeshed in clientelist politics as the politician secured his hold on their votes, was relatively uninvolved. Although polls agree that people vote on the basis of constituency service and brokerage ability, few voters actually have any direct experience of political brokerage. A survey of Dublin, carried out by the Institute of Public Administration in 1971, suggested that four out of five people had *never* contacted a politician for any reason.[6] This is scarcely the basis for clientelist politics. Numerous politicians expected that brokerage contacts would only provide them with marginal electoral insurance.

Clinics should be the backbone of the clientelist machine: the voter, asking for assistance, is transformed into the client, who repays the incurred debt on election day. In practice, many people made the rounds of all politicians' clinics and, even if helped, could not be depended on for future support. There were no links with one politician to the exclusion of others, and politicians competed to "help" voters. While an election canvass produced numerous people who remembered past favours and voted accordingly, politicians could not ensure that a brokerage debt was actually repaid on polling day. Even those voters whose cases required considerable time and effort did not necessarily show their gratitude on election day, and most

6 Based on the author's analysis of survey data made available by the Institute of Public Administration. A preliminary account of the survey was published in Litton (1973). The survey was based on a random sample chosen from the electoral registers of 24 Dublin wards; the wards were chosen as representative of social and economic variations in Dublin (c.f., Bannon *et al.*, 1981). One question, for which there were 499 valid responses, asked whether the respondent had ever contacted a politician or an official about a complaint or inquiry.

Dublin politicians lacked the detailed personal knowledge needed to deduce, from voting boxes, how specific individuals or families voted. With Dublin's densely populated urban constituencies and geographically mobile voters, the creation of the vast personal networks which would be needed to monitor voters was beyond the resources of most politicians. Politicians believed that they were inevitably dependent on the votes of anonymous constituents with whom they could have no direct links. The votes which could be obtained on the basis of personal support or the support of local notables were significant, but insufficient.

In the absence of personal links, politicians depended on the voter's sense of moral obligation, and they worked hard to create a climate of obligation and gratitude. Thus, attendance at funerals, testimonial dinners, social events, and public meetings were personal contacts that, hopefully, would be remembered at the polling booth. Through clinics, a politician demonstrated he was available and working on the voter's behalf. They may never need his help, but they knew he would be there if they did need him. Attendance at residents' association meetings were mandatory not because the politician could solve the residents' problems, but because failure to appear would create a bad impression. Politicians used personal and party supporters to maintain a tenuous link with local groups, and such links provided useful information by which politicians could create and maintain their reputation for action and concern.

Politicians attended numerous party meetings, residents' meetings and community social events, and could have two or three meetings on the same night. If the rewards of political brokerage were so undependable and diffuse, why did politicians spend so much time in constituency work (Whyte, 1966; Review Body on Higher Renumeration in the Public Sector, 1972, pp. 135-126, 210-220)? Proportional representation and multi-seat constituencies not only encouraged intra-party rivalry, but also forced politicians to compete for the votes for loyal party supporters by providing whatever they demanded. Politicians were sufficiently vulnerable that if voters wanted brokerage, they had no choice but to provide a brokerage service, whether it netted them a clientelist reward or not, and whether the brokerage was necessary or not. A good community reputation could make the difference between success and failure on election day.

Although clientelism was not dominant in the electoral arena, it clearly dominated party politics. Politicial parties were pyramids of links between patron/brokers and their clients with benefits flowing down (or across) in exchange for support. No one was uninvolved or disinterested; everyone was an actual (or potential) friend or enemy. Politicians competed for the support of the limited number of party activists, and activists were seen to be clients of rivals and so themselves were rivals. Politicians spent much of their time

wooing activists, and used whatever influence they had to assist activists and create personal ties of gratitude and obligation. They could deduce how activists voted in constituency rivalries, and so could monitor whether clientelist debts were being repaid. The support of party activists was needed to survive nomination battles and competitive electoral campaigns, and personal supporters were used to infiltrate the local organisation. Politicians tried to create personal clienteles, and, if possible, replace the formal party organisation with their own private machine (see Carty (1981) for a description of this process in Kildare). Outside the party structure, the support of local notables provided money, canvassers and some bloc votes at election time. There was an unlimited pool of potential personal supporters, so politicians did not have to compete for the same supporters. The only exception was the limited number of local figures (e.g., priests, gardai and teachers) whose continual support could help politicians create a local reputation for concern and activity. Such figures rarely become identified with individual politicians and preferred to play one off against the other.

Thus, when a politician assisted a voter, he did not necessarily create a regular, persistent and diffuse relationship of exchange. Instead of creating a "debt" repaid by a "client", the politician received an indirect benefit: his community reputation was enhanced. The impression of personal concern and community activity delivered votes of passive party supporters and local residents. Only the political parties had the dense overlapping linkages characteristic of a clientelist system.

Brokerage

Although not linked to a broadly based clientelism, brokerage none the less existed. The politician may create a debt and acquire a personal supporter through his intervention in the allocation of state resources, or he may only gain indirectly through an enhanced reputation; in both cases, the politician seemed to produce results where direct action by voters or party activists could not. Voters obviously saw some benefit to political brokerage. Is this brokerage the consequence of voters' naivety and cynicism (which permits them to be fooled by politicians' claims), or do covert webs of influence actually determine state allocations of public goods (despite bureaucrats' claims to the contrary)?

Much political brokerage appeared, initially, to be illusory; politicians were claiming personal credit for providing legal entitlements. However, politicians argued that, whatever the legal entitlements, the person would have received nothing without the politician's help. Clearly, many people did not know what state services were available, which departments administered them, what the qualifying criteria were, or what the application procedures were. They felt that the politician was the only expert who could be trusted

to assist them through the bureaucratic maze, and provide a state service that might otherwise have been denied. The broker's "profit" derived from providing a service that was easy and quick for him, but difficult and time-consuming for an outsider. He thus hoped to create a debt at little actual cost to himself.

Politicians' often exaggerated claims of influence could not be disputed because knowledge of administrative procedures was severely restricted. In this, the bureaucrats' silent collusion was vital (c.f., Higgins, 1982), and, while many bureaucrats were derisive about politicians' claims, they none the less assented through silence. The state agencies made little effort to publicise entitlements and considered information in the hands of outsiders a dangerous threat. The recently created community information centres provided information about entitlements and procedures and were thus an alternative to politicians. Yet they had only limited local support, and politicians retain bureaucrats' support for claims of "special" access. Bureaucrats responded to politicians when they would not to voters, perhaps because the bureaucracy perceived itself as more vulnerable to politicians than voters. Often, the response merely appeased the politician without altering the end result, but a cosmetic reaction which fostered the illusion of special influence was sufficient for the politician's purposes. Voters commonly received copies of correspondence as "proof" of politicians' influence, and obtained "special" interviews with officials (and Ministers) arranged by politicians.

Brokerage sometimes forced a case to be reviewed, a decision to be speeded up, or a service to be provided. The lack of outside information often permitted a politician to claim exaggerated influence and therefore an unjustified moral debt. Lacking the information to distinguish the illusory response from the effective response, the voter could only gain by asking the politician for assistance. As long as politicians feel at the mercy of the voters, they will respond to any demand, however trivial. Voters obtain a very efficient secretary, at very little cost to themselves.

Sometimes, politicians claimed credit for providing benefits for the entire community (e.g., schools or roads), and tried to make the whole community the politician's client. The electoral repayment for community clientelism could not be depended on, as many voters held allegiances to other parties or individuals. Exchanges with individuals, whose repayment could be verified, remained the best use for the politician's scarce resource of actual influence. Only occasionally were politicians able to influence, by virtue of political office or party position, the allocations of state resources in the manner suggested by Bax. Some interventions were as minor as which roads were repaired, while others were as major as planning decisions which increased land values. Planning was a "cheap" resource since there was an unlimited supply of permissions. Politicians did not need to compete and instead co-

operated to get permissions for individual clients. Political alliances, both within parties and across party lines, were common in Dublin County Council as councillors helped each other's clients. Significant, though unacknowledged, pressure was brought to bear on any politician who did not co-operate with his party colleagues (see Komito, 1983). The clients benefiting from such influence were usually personal supporters. In the cases discovered, clients discharged debts during electoral campaigns; money, material support, canvassers and personal influence all helped secure the politician's re-election. While such exchanges were significant for the people involved, they were a small proportion of total interventions.

If influence accounted for only a small portion of brokerage exchanges, this does not therefore mean that all other voters were being fooled by illusory patronage. Brokerage often resulted in the provision of a legitimate service which might not otherwise have been obtained. In that sense, it was insurance for voters, who had nothing to lose by contacting their politician. The politician dare not restrict his assistance only to those who will become clients, as this would foster an image of uncaring inaccessibility. The politician was forced to provide a service, while unable to exact any concrete return. If power is measured by the ability to determine the rules of exchange, then we must question the assumption that politicians have much power. It would seem that voters, collectively, determine the rules.

It is difficult to quantify the result of interventions, as politicians themselves were sometimes unsure what effect their interventions had. Since the electoral reward for brokerage was uncertain, politicians tried to achieve maximum results with minimum cost to themselves. Often, they only went through the motions of sending a letter or contacting an official simply on the chance it would help a particular case. Only if there were special circumstances, or if the politician was well organised, were cases followed up. A crucial factor was often the particular department which administered the desired service. For example, interventions regarding telephones usually made no difference and any claims of influence were illusory. Interventions about social welfare might force an internal review, but a similar review for medical card applicants usually produced no change. Interventions about local housing might be effective, based on the politicians' superior knowledge of procedures, and planning interventions often altered decisions, due to the politicians' influence. Generally, politicians were more effective with local authorities than government departments, and least effective with semi-state bodies. Local authority officials were more vulnerable to pressure and obstruction and semi-state bodies least vulnerable to either. Most politicians interviewed estimated that in about two out of ten cases their intervention made a substantial difference, but exact figures must await detailed studies of particular politicians' caseloads.

To summarise, some interventions were indeed the "privatisation of public goods". Such influence was used to create personal supporters necessary to survive intra-party conflicts. Some interventions provided only illusory patronage, but exaggerated claims could not be disproven, as brokerage recipients lacked independent information. Many interventions provided marginal assistance and depended on politicians' monopoly over both information and access. Politicians were unable to guarantee recipient's voting support in exchange for these brokerage services.

Brokerage and State Services

Some recipients of state services seemed to use brokerage more than others, and this related to the recipient's economic dependence on state assistance. The provision of housing provides a useful example of this. According to Dublin politicians, public housing is the most common subject of representations (see also Higgins, 1982; Roche, 1982). At a typical clinic, 12 out of the 20 cases raised dealt with local authority housing, and often the same people kept coming back again and again. It is instructive to examine the way in which administrative procedures foster a feeling of dependence on the part of voters, which politicians then exploit. State intervention in housing distinguishes between public sector and private sector housing. Many are barred from ever entering the private sector because they are unable to accumulate the necessary deposit or do not have the steady and secure income required by Building Societies (see Baker and O'Brien, 1979). The state provides subsidised accommodation for those who cannot purchase privately, but in limited numbers and as allocated by local authorities. Further, private and public housing estates tend to be geographically distinct (c.f., Bannon *et al.*, 1981). State intervention in housing serves to direct families possessing different economic resources into different areas of Dublin. Distinct economic categories are thus constituted as distinct geographical groups.

Those who are unable to enter the private housing sector can only submit their name to the local authority and wait for public housing. There is little an applicant can do to determine what kind of house he will get, where it will be, or when it will be offered; all these decisions are made by others. Even when a house is obtained, the local authority remains an autocratic landlord. This contrasts starkly with state aid to private house owners. Private buyers receive tax relief after the property is purchased. State assistance is not dependent on the location, type, or cost of the house, this is all left to the individual's choice and financial resources. Intrusion into the house owner's life is minimal and state assistance originates from central government rather than local authorities. The state supports individual choice and independence in private housing but constrains and limits choice in public housing.

In public housing, families are competing for a limited supply of houses. Politicians, who may have influence and who certainly know the procedures, are obvious resources to tap, and the politician takes full advantage of this. In the County Council, councillors always resisted giving applicants information about housing lists; the politicians preferred to reserve that information for themselves and take full credit when a house became available. Once housing allocations had been made, a councillor would often congratulate his "clients", emphasising that he had been looking after their interests. In Dublin Corporation, applicants are assigned a specific number of points based on a complex, but public, rating system. Applicants thus had some idea where they stood on the priority list. However, many still went to politicians for assistance. Politicians, at their clinics, were observed to take details of housing cases and promise to look after the matter. Usually, they simply found out how many points the applicant had and how many houses were going to become available. Politicians would suggest how to increase the number of points a family had (thus increasing the family's priority), and, whether successful or not, the politician still received credit for "getting" the house.

Ironically, since there were a limited number of houses available, politicians themselves competed to obtain houses for their own "clients". In the end, the politicians cancelled each other out, and politicians accepted that few people got houses who did not deserve them. The County Manager made the final housing decisions, which suited many politicians. Some suggested that if they had real influence, they would be blamed by the many disappointed applicants and would retain the support of only the few successful ones. As it is, politicians are able to claim credit if a client gets a house and blame the bureaucracy if the client does not.

Similar situations exist regarding medical cards, social welfare entitlements, job training schemes and so forth. Individuals did not trust bureaucratic procedures and sought assistance from the only reliable expert: the politician. There was often no one else with both the social links with applicants and also access to the bureacuracy. Few other local figures had the same access to such a broad range of government departments. Since deprived families have tended to become segregated into public housing estates, politicians representing such areas spent much of their time intervening on behalf of such individuals. The interventions were directed to administrative agencies where the politician's knowledge and access often made a difference.

Brokerage politics was not confined to public housing and deprived families, though it was most prevalent in such areas. Private housing estates, composed of voters with greater economic resources, also made demands upon politicians and received minor benefits in return. They wanted schools, or parks, or developers to finish estates. Such benefits are indivisible and

cannot be allocated on an individual basis. Residents tended to organise collectively, in residents' groups, to seek such common benefits. Rarely did politicians receive individual demands from such voters. This may result from a combination of factors: they had fewer individual demands, were bureaucratically literate, or used other mediators. Certainly they did not have the limited range of possible links with the state that characterised more deprived families.

If there is, in Ireland, a "tendency to operate through personal contacts rather than through organizational procedures" (Pyne, 1974, p. 34), then it is clear that the resource of "personal contacts" is unevenly distributed throughout the population. For example, whatever other advantages gained from third-level education, people also acquire a broad range of future contacts. Their access via personal friends, neighbours, or relations decreases their dependence on local politicians. For less privileged citizens, however, the range of possible contacts is limited and the local politician may be the only available contact. Social mobility is clearly limited (Hutchinson, 1969), so both personal access to the bureaucracy and bureaucratic "literacy" remain restricted resources.

Regions and interests groups have received state benefits for which political parties have claimed credit, and a moral obligation or an instrumental desire to provide electoral support in return may be created (e.g., Sacks, 1976, pp. 4-5, 65-66). This would not seem to constitute "mass clientelism" since, in the Irish case, there are few direct personal exchanges between the groups and the political parties (Graziano, 1975, pp. 11-13). In addition, Irish politicians do not seem to have sufficient patronage "prizes" to fuel such large-scale mass clientelism.[7] None the less, there remains the strong belief (accurate or not) that a local advocate is useful, whether this means electing a neighbour to the County Council or wanting at least one local TD to be a government Minister. Studies have shown that a local candidate, regardless of party affiliation, will still poll well in national and local elections (Parker, 1983). At both levels, voters demanded personalised access. whether that access be fictional or effective.

Brokerage and Bureaucracy

It is clear that people suspect that state benefits are allocated through competition amongst interested groups; the state and its administrators are not perceived as referees or impartial guardians of the public good. This suspicion is often explained as a distrust of "universalistic" values; those who

7 One result of this scarcity of "prizes" is the well-known competition amongst parties and politicians over the credit for any large projects which benefit a region or interest group, and the difficulty of proving or disproving the conflicting claims (e.g., Higgins, 1982).

do not understand forms and bureaucracies believe, incorrectly, that decisions are based on personalistic criteria and so they themselves need a personal advocate (c.f., Chubb, 1970; Sacks, 1976). If that public perception of personalism were corrected, brokerage politics would decrease; since an inefficient bureaucracy is the undesirable by-product of brokerage politics, this decrease would be worthwhile (Roche, 1982). Thus, the Devlin Report (Public Services Organisation Review Group, 1969) remarked that "the 'representations' system helps perpetuate the misconception that everything can be 'fixed'. . . . Most felt grievances are not justifiable" (p. 448). The Devlin Rport was graphic about the consequences:

> Paper work is to a large extent the consequence of responsibility to the Dail. The observance of this consistency of treatment impedes the expeditious clearance of work. This result derives largely from the direct appeal to Parliament, even on matters of small importance.
>
> . . . higher officers who must report personally to the Minister are forced to interest, [sic] themselves in detail. . . . This involves a large expenditure of the time of higher staff in going over relatively minor pieces of executive work done by juniors (pp. 125-128).

Interventions merely waste time, and a bureaucracy required to justify individual decisions to inquiring politicians must become rigid and slow.

Yet, people's perceived need for personal advocates cannot simply be dismissed as "misconception". If bureaucracies actually do respond more quickly to politicians than citizens, then acquiring a political advocate makes good sense. Interviewing a number of TDs, Roche (1982) found that, for eight out of ten politicians, administrative delay accounted for 90 per cent of their interventions. People, getting no response from administrators, turned to politicians. Officials I talked with argued that politicians' inquiries inevitably take priority over citizens'; the civil service is primarily accountable to politicians and not the public. Worse still, in order to protect itself from unpredictable and varying political criticism, the civil service becomes cautious and precedent ridden. Is this a vicious circle, in which the administrative response to political brokerage creates a greater need for brokerage?

Such explanations presume that administrative redress is the only reason why citizens have recourse to political brokerage. However, the political broker does more than simply provide an extra-bureaucratic appeals system; he also provides information about what services are available and how to apply for them. As state intervention in public life increases, administrative procedures become more complex and confusing. A specialist is needed to assist individuals with complex administrative regulations; if the civil service does not provide such specialists, then people's recourse to politicians remains crucial. The failure to provide information about procedures and entitle-

ments, as well as evidence of claimed impartiality, simply emphasises the citizen's clear appreciation that brokerage is necessary.

Since the bureaucracy itself assists in making knowledge and access a brokerage commodity, perhaps we should enquire whether existing benefits for the bureaucracy make brokerage politics a tolerable consequence. For one thing, politicians are useful protectors, since they isolate civil servants from public pressure. It is clear that although administrators are vulnerable to politicians, they are also protected from the public. In dealing with the public, the best response is the safe response, as epitomised by one civil servant who commented: "I have nothing to gain and everything to lose by giving out information". The civil servant or local official who behaved otherwise risked embarrassing both his fellow workers and the elected representatives who might have to take public blame. As a consequence, it was politicians who provided citizens with information, as well as the personal contact that many found reassuring.

Brokerage politics also fulfilled useful administrative functions. The competitive electoral system forces the politician to know both his constituency and administrative procedures. By responding to individuals' demands regarding state services, the politician, in effect, monitors the provision of state benefits and helps correct errors (in both individual cases and overall policy). It would be very expensive for the state to administer a service which politicians provide freely. Local officials seemed especially aware of this benefit, which may be why they were usually more helpful to politicians than central government departments. Serious cases were directed to the proper department and less serious cases were delayed (or denied). Enormous amounts of money were saved since many people were unable to claim their full legitimate entitlements as citizens. The administrative system, as much as the political system, might not benefit from a disruption in the status quo of brokerage politics.

IV CONCLUSION

A number of points emerge from this discussion of brokerage and clientelism in an urban setting. First, it is useful to distinguish brokerage, clientelist links and clientelism. Brokerage involves special access to restricted resources, clientelist links imply an ongoing dyadic relationship, and clientelism suggests clientelist links embracing all participants. The analytic distinction permits one to differentiate types of voter-politician interactions. Although these interactions may overlap in rural settings, such an overlap is not inevitable. In Dublin, clientelism was a phenomenon of party politics. Although brokerage extended beyond the party arena and included voters as well as political activists, people who used politicians as brokers did not necessarily

become clients. Indeed, many voters were only peripherally involved in brokerage, and would not often, if ever, contact their local politician. Thus, one should not necessarily expect the behaviours associated with clientelist systems to be found outside the party structure in Ireland.

Second, while politicians rarely provided state resources, they did not simply fool voters by personalising legitimate benefits either. The political broker "sold" his knowledge and access, and the voter acquired a personal advocate. Those most economically dependent on direct state intervention (e.g., medical cards, unemployment assistance, Corporation housing) seemed most likely to need brokers. The closed bureaucratic system and finite supply of available advocates and resources (e.g., housing) clearly created the conditions for brokerage politics. The politician provided a service that, while inexpensive for him, would be expensive for voters and was thus valued by them. The provision of services that might otherwise be denied or delayed was a worthwhile benefit to voters, and, in return, the politician enhanced his reputation in the community and possibly increased his electoral support. Brokerage was thus a result of specific structural conditions and was not caused solely by an agrarian economy or peasant values.

Third, the significance of brokerage in Irish politics may be exaggerated, simply because it is the most visible manifestation of politics. There was, in Dublin, no simple or direct exchange of political brokerage for electoral support. The logic of electoral competition forced politicians to provide brokerage even without any guaranteed electoral benefit for themselves. In Irish elections, the Proportional Representation – Single Transferable vote system permits voters to support both persons and parties. See Chubb 1970, for detailed description of electoral procedures. Writers often emphasise the competition amongst rival candidates of the same party, while taking party loyalties for granted. Thus, brokerage issues, which often determine the outcome of such rivalries, dominate analyses of politics. But, personal votes are cast in the context of existing party loyalties; to what extent do they transcend those loyalties? Political biographies (especially during the early 1960s) suggest that politicians leaving their party found that many of their "personal" votes were primarily party votes which remained with the party.[8] A brokerage reputation may determine which candidate within a party receives a vote, but does it also determine party support? The relationship between party support and brokerage needs further examination; it is not at all clear that party loyalty is simply personalistic or clientelist loyalty "writ large."

The difficulty of distinguishing personal versus party support is illustrated in election surveys. Surveys often ask voters to indicate on what basis they

8 Not withstanding Neil Blaney who argued, significantly, that it was everyone else who departed from the party's ideals. Independent Fianna Fail was thus able to maintain the ideological loyalty of voters.

will be choosing a candidate: constituency service, Taoiseach, Cabinet, or party policies. Invariably, a high percentage (about 40 per cent) respond with constituency service, thus "proving" the importance of brokerage. But, if the voters take party loyalty for granted, then Taoiseach, Cabinet, or party policies are not salient issues. Once committed to a particular party, personalistic preference is as good a way as any to decide amongst rival party candidates, and so survey results may underplay party loyalty. Personalism or brokerage does not explain party loyalties. After all, brokerage is not unique to Irish politics and politicians. Politicians in other countries commonly articulate, and are expected to articulate, constituent's demands (Mezey, 1976). Despite this, such politicians also manage to discuss policy issues and their political parties articulate the economic interests of supporters. Brokerage or personalism is not sufficient explanation for Irish political parties which do not articulate, and are not forced to articulate, specific economic policy concerns. An analytic account of brokerage exchanges can identify the political and administrative structures which encourage brokerage; it does not explain the structures themselves. Brokerage diverts attention away from these structures and so may indirectly help maintain them, but it does not create them.

Political brokerage may simply be the most visible manifestation of the common tendency to deal with friends. The private morality of personal exchange and mutual obligation is not restricted to politicians and their clients. Personal contacts are utilised throughout Irish society, and, with a relatively small population of just over three million, this is hardly surprising. The unequal distribution of such contacts, due to economic and social differences, is perhaps more relevant.

The implications of this different view of Irish brokerage for theories of Irish politics are significant. Brokerage will not necessarily disappear as the country modernises or as its citizens become educated (a common assumption, as illustrated in Chubb (1970)). Rather than an outmoded style of behaviour, brokerage is an effective solution to a particular set of problems. The important point, for future policy, is that it may, by its nature, be merely an interim solution. It does not alter the circumstances which originally fostered it, and may only provide superficial relief while actually creating a greater need for fundamental, but postponed, changes. There are already indications that the system is rapidly becoming overloaded, perhaps to the point of breakdown.[9] In a sense, the currency of brokerage faces devaluation

9 One indication of this overload is a recent civil service union motion to ban representations, partly as retribution for low staffing levels. Another indication is a recent debate on Dáil reform in which politician after politician complained about the bureaucracy's lack of responsiveness to both the public and the politicians themselves (Dáil Debates, Vol. 339, nos. 4-10).

due to inflation. For example, escalating political competition engenders exaggerated claims of influence and so threatens political credibility. On another front, the state now provides more benefits to a growing proportion of the population (National Economic and Social Council, 1977), and new regulations and procedures, grafted onto existing rules, makes specialist knowledge a more vital resource than ever before. The increasingly complex and unwieldy administrative structure causes more individualistic representations and overworks politicians and bureaucrats alike.

Brokerage "succeeds" because it mitigates, but does not totally remove, the vulnerability of clients (Clapham, 1982). The problem, now, is that radical changes may be required to maintain the support of vast segments of the population whose need is, increasingly, neither removed nor mitigated.

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