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CAREER AND RECRUITMENT PATTERNS OF ITALIAN
LEGISLATORS. A CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNDER-
STANDING OF A POLARIZED POLITICAL SYSTEM.



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1. Elite Analysis and the Interpretation of the Italian Political System

The Italian political system has attracted a good deal of attention from political scientists, both Italian and foreign, for its contradictory and paradoxical features. It is enough to mention here just a few of these: a high level of ideological polarization between the parties (Sani and Sartori, 1982) but at the same time an uninterrupted tradition of bargaining and reaching compromises across party lines and even with the so called anti-system parties (Cazzola, 1974); a very high level of cabinet instability (Herman, 1975) but also the unbroken predominance in government of the same party and a high level of continuity of the governmental elite (Calise and Mannheimer, 1982); recurrent fears of a regime crisis, but already a record of thirty five years of survival of the constitution of 1947 (to be compared for instance with the only thirteen years of the French Fourth Republic); a long history of harsh public confrontations between the two largest parties (Christian Democracy and Communist Party), but also in recent years increasingly open talks about the possibility of building a grand coalition embracing both (and even a failed attempt in this direction). It can be rightly said that each of these elements conveys some aspect of the overall picture of Italian politics.

To explain these paradoxes, to put them in a balanced perspective, and what is even more exacting to forecast in what, if any, direction the political system is moving is surely a major scientific challenge. Of the leading interpretations of the Italian case I will mention here only two that stand out for their comprehensiveness and theoretical soundness: one suggested by Sartori and the other by Di Palma. Both are well known and there is no need

therefore to discuss them in detail. It is enough here to recall the core of their arguments.

The central variable chosen by Sartori for investigating the (mal-) functioning of Italian politics is the party system. According to him it is the extreme and polarized multipartism which, with its specific properties (high number of parties, high level of polarization, ideological style of competition, existence of anti-system parties, distribution of the parties around three instead of two poles, limited alternance of parties within central governmental coalitions, irresponsible oppositions), can explain many of the strictures of the Italian political system (Sartori, 1966, 1976, 1982).

Starting from a rather different point of view Di Palma reaches a conclusion that shows a great deal of complementarity with the sartorian interpretation. Through a detailed analysis of legislative outputs and of legislators' attitudes he brings into light the lack of agreement on the basic decisional rules among the main political forces of Italy. The result is a deficit of legitimacy of the central institutions, and foremost among them parliament. Given this situation the system can and does "survive" but only - as he brilliantly demonstrates - at the price of not "governing", that is to say of avoiding all divisive issues (Di Palma, 1977). Even if focus and approach are different, the connection with Sartori, and particularly with his concept of polarization, is clear. Di Palma agrees that the polarized party system is the main factor behind the lack of an agreement on fundamentals between political forces and also behind the weak and troubled governmental coalitions which are responsible for the limited decisional efficacy of the

political system.

The purpose of this article is not to challenge these interpretations, with which on the whole I agree, but rather to supplement them with a further perspective which I believe may help to move a further step toward a full understanding of the intricacies of the Italian case. My suggestion is that we need to know more about the linkages between broad structural characters of the political system, as the party system, on one side and decisional rules and legislative outputs on the other side. These linkages can be best approached by looking at political elites. To put it in a very schematic fashion a chain of interactions of this type is conceivable:

party system → political elites → decisional rules → policy outputs

Given the dominant role of parties in recruiting and organizing political elites we can reasonably expect that the specific features of the party system will play a significant role in the shaping of political elites, which in their turn are going to influence the decisional setting (if not the formal rules which may be constitutionally sanctioned, at least their interpretation) and through it the policy outputs of the political system. This article will try to shed more light upon the central link of this chain and see how this new intervening variable fits into the current picture of the Italian case. The main questions I will address are three. First: what kind of political elite is produced by the Italian party system and what specific features of the latter does it embody? Second: is it possible to detect a meaningful relationship between the characteristics of the Italian political elite and the lack of agreement on the basic decisional rules which together with the mutual distrust between the major political

actors makes the Italian parliament such a poor policy-making institution? Third: what has been the impact of time over this situation? Can we detect from our vantage point enough change to suggest that Italy, as some observers have suggested (Pellicani, 1974; Farneti, 1978; Graziano, 1979), has already "moved out" of the pessimistic pictures we have mentioned?

Before trying to answer such questions a methodological point must be taken care of. How is the analysis of political elites to be designed in order to serve our purpose? In principle the answer is clear: the analysis must be developed within a theoretical framework capable of relating on one side the political elite variables to the party system and on the other side to the institutional (parliamentary) dimension. But we need to be more specific. A first point to be made is that when talking of political elites, reference will be made - unless otherwise specified - to the parliamentary section of the elites. Given the nature of the questions raised in this study it is this part of the political elite that needs to be explored. The second point concerns the point of view from which to look at the elite. Instead of following the two more traditional points of view - the sociological centered on the analysis of the social background of members of the elite, and the cultural, centered on the analysis of their values and beliefs - the dominant point of view adopted here will be a structural one. This is not to say that the other two approaches are irrelevant; on the contrary some use will be made also of them and particularly of social background data. Their major limitation is that both tend to conceive political elites as simple aggregates of individuals having all the same weight. Insofar as they share this perspective it should not come as a surprise that their ability to predict

behavior is low (Edinger and Searing, 1967), for political elites, as rightly defined them one of the fathers of elite theory, are first of all organized sets of individuals (Mosca, 1884). Therefore their behavior and impact upon political reality can not be understood unless their structure is first appraised. And more particularly if we want to evaluate how a political elite fits into a specific institutional setting as that of parliamentary democracy we need to check to what extent the structure of the former is coherent with that of the latter.

This article will therefore try to assess what type of elite structure is produced by the Italian party system and how this elite structure fits into the parliamentary institution. The following four concepts will be used for orienting the analysis in this direction: 1. political career; 2. recruitment; 3. parliamentarization of the parties; 4. institutionalization of parliament. The first two have been extensively used and discussed in the field of elite studies (Marvick, 1968 and 1976; Schlesinger, 1966; Czudnowski, 1975; Herzog, 1975; Putnam, 1976; just to mention a few). The fourth, first employed within the field of general development studies (Eisenstadt, 1964; Huntington, 1965 and 1968), has received a specific application by scholars concerned with the development of parliamentary institutions (Polsby, 1968; Loewenberg, 1973; Sisson, 1973). In this perspective linkages have been established with the analysis of (parliamentary) elites. Of these concepts the third is comparatively the least developed. First used as a criterion for the classification of parties (Duverger, 1951), only more recently an attempt has been made to apply it in the context of a joint analysis of parliamentary institutions and political elites (Cotta, 1976 and 1979; Leonardi,

Nanetti and Pasquino, 1978).

I will provide first a short definition of these concepts and then discuss in which way they can be related to our specific problems.

Def. of political career: "The process of accumulation of political resources that through a sequence of steps leads an individual to become a member of the political elite at a given level".

Def. of recruitment: "The institutional process through which series of individuals are brought to fill series of institutional positions"⁽¹⁾.

As it is apparent from these definitions the two concepts are complementary. The difference is in the perspective from which the same phenomena are looked at. An individual perspective in the first, a collective and institutional perspective in the second.

Def. of parliamentarization of parties: "The degree to which a party is in a symbiotic relationship with the parliamentary institution and is influenced by its institutional specificity". The concept applies also to the process by which higher degrees of this property are reached. A further articulation of the concept may be provided by pointing to its possible dimensions: structural, teleological, behavioral. According to this specification the evaluation of the party/parliament relationship will take into account the degree to which the structural patterns, of the strategic aims and basic values or the behavior of a party are compatible and consistent with the specific institutional configuration of the parliament⁽²⁾.

Def. of parliamentary institutionalization: "The process by which

a parliament becomes an autonomous (though not separate) institution with a specific identity of its own and with the ability to influence its political environment accordingly".

The concept of institutionalization may be used not only for designating the process but also the properties resulting from it.

The argument I will try to check in the next pages runs along the following lines. The investigation of careers and recruitment patterns points to the existence of a significant degree of heterogeneity within the Italian parliamentary elite. This heterogeneity concerns the structure itself of the parliamentary elites and is to be interpreted more specifically as a difference of some magnitude in the degree of parliamentarization of the major parties. It is possible to demonstrate therefore that the Italian party system is not only characterized by a significant ideological polarization but also by what might be termed a structural polarization. Finally I will try to show that this situation has a direct bearing on the institutional health of the Italian parliament, or to put it in other terms affects negatively its institutionalization. If the evidence we will discuss supports this argument we will have brought some more light upon the linkages between the phenomena discussed by Sartori and Di Palma. Moreover we will have some new indicators to assess how much change has taken place in the years examined.

2. A short interlude on the institutionalization of parliament and the parliamentarization of parties.

Before looking at the data a point deserves further discussion: the relationship between the concepts of parliamentary institution-

alization and parliamentarization of parties. The relevance of the point becomes immediately apparent when we come to grips with one of the major dimensions of the concept of institutionalization: the dimension of boundary definition or autonomy.

Polsby states that an institutionalized parliament will be "well bounded, that is to say, differentiated from its environment". And he further suggests that a particularly suitable point of view for analyzing this property can be offered by looking at the parliamentary elite and its continuity (Polsby, 1968). A high level of institutionalization will be associated with a high degree of continuity of the members of parliament, i.e. low rates of turnover and long tenures. What is exactly the direction of this relationship is not discussed at great length by Polsby. But it seems reasonable to assume a certain circularity of effects. On one side elite continuity can be viewed as the result of a high level of autonomy of parliament vis à vis its environment: first because the incumbents tend to attach a greater value to maintaining their position inside an institution that has gained a specific identity and prominence, second because it is more difficult for outsiders to challenge them given the influence they derive from the institution. On the other side a high level of elite continuity reinforces institutional identity and coherence, while on the contrary large and recurrent entries of new members would pose serious problems of institutional socialization and disrupt the rules and conventions according to which the parliamentary institution works (Loewenberg, 1973).

Applying these concepts to the Italian case (but the same would be true for most European countries) raises immediately a problem. The point is that the formulation offered by Polsby pays

no attention to the role of parties. In particular the parliamentary elite is treated as an undifferentiated aggregate of individuals; their links with party structures are not considered. This approach may be correct for the U.S. Congress, with its highly independent members and its parties that are loosely organized outside the parliamentary arena and at the national level. In this case parties can be legitimately viewed as a phenomenon largely internal to the parliamentary institution and having only a negligible impact upon its autonomy. The situation is clearly different in all the countries where parties are highly developed organizations, with a very specific and distinctive institutional identity of their own, and are at the same time "internal" and "external" to the parliamentary structure. They can not be forgotten: the parliamentary elite is at the same time part of the external party elite. Now if we interpret the autonomy dimension of institutionalization as "boundary definition" in a strict sense, we must end by saying that most European parliaments are not institutionalized since it is hardly possible to draw a neat line separating the parliamentary institution from parties which on the contrary continuously impinge upon the former from outside. However such a conclusion would in many cases be clearly absurd. We need therefore a somewhat different formulation of this dimension of institutionalization.

For this purpose the concept of parliamentarization proves useful. Such a concept, as defined above, helps to see things from a different but complementary point of view: not so much how parliament is separated from other institutions (in this case parties), but how other institutions (in this case parties) are affected by parliament. The concept of party parliamentarization draws the attention to the degree to which party organizations establish a strict relationship with parliament and come to be moulded by its specific institutional properties. A parliament - or perhaps we should say

with Riggs (1973) a constitutive system, combining within this concept parliament and electoral process - means a set of rules, a pool of political resources, a system of hierarchies and careers, a style of behavior, a limited range of political ends and especially means. All elements that are institution specific. For a party to be parliamentarized means therefore that these elements have been internalized in its organizational life and have acquired in it a major influence.

Wherever this happens the institutional identity of parliament will not be endangered by the fact of its being deeply interrelated with parties. The autonomy dimension of institutionalization can then be interpreted not so much as institutional separation but in a more general sense as the ability of an institution to keep its specific identity. Which, by the way, is the original meaning conveyed by the word autonomy.

We can therefore conclude that the degree of institutionalization of a parliament, for what concerns the dimension of autonomy and institutional identity, has to be checked against the level of parliamentarization of the major parties operating in the political system. For our purpose it is enough to state that the two properties are associated, without entering into the complex problem of their dynamic relationship and of which comes first⁽³⁾.

The concept of party parliamentarization is relevant not only for the above mentioned dimension but also for that of institutional coherence. For this aspect of institutionalization differences in the level of parliamentarization of the parties represented in parliament deserve special attention. It is true that parliament is an institution specifically devised to make room for diversity within

its benches, but what if differences amount to a substantial heterogeneity on the way parties are related to the institution itself (and this is exactly the meaning of a different level of parliamentarization?) It is not unreasonable to suggest that the existence of large differences among parties on this dimension will make their mutual relations less confident and also more difficult for them to agree on and implement common rules of behavior in accordance with the spirit of the parliamentary institution. Take for example a situation where for one party the authority resides unquestionably in the external party organization and the parliamentary group follows as a block its orders, while in the other parties the parliamentary elite has managed to keep significant margins of autonomy in its legislative behavior and shows a coalitional rather than centralistic structure. It is easy to see that the voting rules preferred by them will not be the same and that there will be problems in the reaching of agreements and even more in their implementation.

Among the dimensions of the parliamentarization of parties (structural, teleological, behavioral), the structural one is the key dimension for the argument developed here. Without denying the importance of the other two and the value of the insights that can be gained from them⁽⁴⁾, my suggestion is that we must look at the structures of parties if we want to evaluate the soundness of their involvement in such a long term process as the institutionalization of parliament.

3. Careers and recruitment patterns of Italian legislators.

The data I will use in this analysis are referred, unless otherwise

specified, to the members of the lower house (Camera dei Deputati) of the Italian parliament. The Camera is the largest of the two - with 630 members against 315 of the Senato - and for our purposes the most interesting since top political leaders tend to be its members. The time period covered here includes the Constituent Assembly elected in 1946 and the first six legislatures of the Camera (1948-1976). Of all the parliamentary groups I will consider only the three largest: the Christian Democratic (from now on DC), the Communist (PCI) and the Socialist groups (PSI). During this period their average share of parliamentary seats was approximately 80%: it is therefore legitimate to skip in this analysis the smaller groups.

What we will try to see is if there are any significant differences in the political careers of the legislators belonging to these parties and in the way they are recruited into the national law-making body. And particularly to what degree these differences affect the level of parliamentarization of the parties and through this also the degree of institutionalization of the Italian parliament.

In order to do this the two concepts of career and recruitment must be further specified. For what concerns the former, I propose to articulate its analysis into three career stages. The career preceding the first admission to parliament can be divided into: 1.a pre-political stage, i.e. the process of accumulation of politically relevant resources that takes place before or outside a direct involvement in specifically political institutions; 2.a political stage, i.e. the accession to and the ascent through political positions till the first election. To these two stages we must add another one: 3.a parliamentary stage, i.e. the further career developments that take place during the parliamentary incumbency of a politician (5).

With regard to recruitment, two aspects seem particularly relevant: 1. the degree of uniformity of recruitment patterns within each political group; 2. the degree to which the recruiting of politicians falls under the control of a centralized and coherent organization (and specifically a party organization) so that it becomes a "planned" operation or, on the contrary is the result of the mutual adjustment of a larger number of independent forces and therefore is more of a "spontaneous" and undetermined process.

Of the two concepts the first aims at determining more exactly when and where the accumulation of resources for a successful career takes place; the second at ascertaining the organizational environment and the forces controlling the development of careers.

Concerning the relationship between resources accumulation and career stages it seems fairly reasonable to state the following proposition: assuming as roughly fixed the amount of resources required for an average political career, it follows that the greater the share of resources accumulated during one stage of the career the smaller will be the share required at the other stages. Accordingly each stage will play a relatively large or smaller part in the global career. Thus, for example, the more important the pre-political stage of a career the less important in terms of resources will be the political stages and viceversa (Eliassen and Pedersen, 1978). The analysis of the social background of legislators will be used here for assessing the relative weight of the first stage. The socioeconomic status of the family of legislators and their educational attainments are the indicators that can give us an idea of the degree of social advantage enjoyed by a politician at the start of his career.

Figures 1 and 2 about here

As figures 1 and 2 show, the differences between the three largest Italian parties are significant on both indicators. During the thirty years period examined, the percentage of legislators with an upper class or upper middle class family background and with a university degree is nearly double among Christian Democrats and Socialists than among Communists. Particularly striking is the difference between the two parties of the left (PCI and PSI), both traditionally appealing to the working class and both placing themselves until recently in the marxist culture (even if with rather different orientations). The PSI, in spite of the fact that its electorate is not sociologically too different from the communist one (Sylos Labini, 1974), is much more similar in the sociological profile of its parliamentary class to the avowedly interclassistic DC. The easiest interpretation of this empirical evidence is that the different social backgrounds of Socialist and Communist legislators are related with differences existing at other stages of the political career and originating from different recruitment models. Clearly the organization of the Socialist party does not provide as many political resources to offset a position of social disadvantage as the Communist party does. Therefore individuals coming from a higher social background are more likely to make a successful career in the first party rather than individuals coming from lower milieus. These results are entirely consistent with the well known difference in the strength of the apparatus of the two leftist parties.

If we look at the same data in historical perspective a general trend toward the lowering of the family social background of legislators can be noticed. Such a change is particularly significant in the DC: the steady growth especially of lower middle class politicians at the expenses of those coming from a socially higher background (30% against

51% in 1946; but 49% against 33% in 1972) points to an increasing importance of the political stages in the recruiting processes of this party. Further empirical evidence for this interpretation will be available as soon as we will examine the other career stages. In any case since also among Communist legislators there is a lowering of family background (the two upper strata decline from 26% in the Constituent Assembly to 13% in the sixth legislature), their distance from legislators of the other parties remains throughout the period fairly large. The data concerning the educational attainments of legislators lend further support to his point: during the whole period the share of Communist members with a university degree is rather constantly more or less half that of Socialist and Christian Democratic legislators. With regard to the last two parties it may be noticed that their educational profile was in the first place never very heterogeneous and that it has become with time even more similar.

Summarizing the first round of data we can say that the general evolutionary trend of the last thirty years points to an overall decrease in the importance of resources accumulated in the pre-political stage of careers. This is particularly clear for family status of MPs, less for education attainments which are stable or even on the rise; it should be borne in mind however that the enlargement of access to certain degrees of education has meant also a devaluation of their social prestige. In any case, in spite of these trends, differences among parties continue to be significant and they consistently single out the PCI as the "different" party vis-à-vis the other two. While in the DC and the PSI social status resources still play a significant role for a sizeable share of legislators, the same is true only for a tiny minority in the PCI. An interesting result is also that the main dividing line for what concerns the social profile of the parliamentary elite does not run

between "left" (PCI and PSI) and "right" (DC) parties. Other dimensions, which we will soon try to analyse, must therefore be at stake.

According to our hypothesis we should expect that in the more specifically political stages of legislators' careers factors compensating for the lesser role of socially advantaged positions will play a greater role among Communist members than among those of the other two parties.

A first proof of this can be obtained by looking at the involvement of legislators in labor unions or similar organizations (6). Generally speaking it might be debated whether such organizations belong to the social or to the political domain, however in the Italian case their strong links with the parties and their deep involvement in political life (up to the point that most of them are split along party lines) make them more appropriate for consideration in connection with the political rather than the pre-political stage of legislations careers.

Fig 3 about here

As it is apparent from Fig. 3 union offices have been a frequent step in the careers of legislators from all the three parties. However this has been more often the case for Communist members of parliament. In recent years, following a trend in the labor unions toward a greater autonomy from parties, a decline in the number of legislators with this kind of experience can be noticed. The two careers seem to part ways. In any case this change has been more dramatic for Socialist and Christian Democratic legislators than for the Communists (PSI: from a maximum of 51% to 38% in the sixth legislature; DC: from 60% to 41%; PCI: from 64% to 55%). Another

difference that deserves to be mentioned concerns the degree of organizational concentration of such an experience. While Communist legislators with a union experience have gained that in most cases from a single organization (the CGIL), for Socialists and even more Christian Democrats the variety of organizations has been far greater (7). All these elements point to a different union/party relationship and therefore to a different meaning of this career step. But for a better understanding of this question we must first turn our attention to the major political experience in the career of legislators, i.e. that connected with the party organizations.

The first thing that must be stressed on this subject is that in Italy it is highly unusual for anyone to become a member of parliament unless he has been previously an active party member and has held some office in the party apparatus. If we check the percentage of legislators who before their first election to parliament had not held any previous party office we find easily that, except for very few and over time declining cases, mainly confined in the PSI and DC parliamentary groups, the external party organization is an indispensable channel of political career for legislators (8). To say this, however, does not yet mean that the weight of this

Fig. 4 about here

career stage is always the same and that party control over recruitment is in every case equally pervasive.

To test more in depth the degree of involvement of legislators in the party organizations I will make use of two indicators: the

age of party affiliation, to understand how early the process of partisan socialization has begun, and the age of first attainment of a party office, to see how early an active role was played and selection took place. It is clear that the earlier these two steps the greater will be the impact of party life in the formation of politicians in terms both of their political culture and of their resources. Both indicators show that while a party experience is almost universal among legislators of all groups, its intensity is however quite different (Fig. 4). It is by far greater for Communist members than for Socialist and even more Christian Democratic legislators. A very early entry in the party organization and assumption of leading roles within it appear to be the main road to a parliamentary career for a Communist politician. For the other politicians these steps may take place at a later stage, which suggests that they may follow other experiences. From a diachronic point of view we must remark that particularly in the case of Christian Democratic legislators both indicators show a steady increase of the role of party life. The early starters almost double both for party affiliation (from 33% to 64%) and for access to party offices (from 21% to 50%) between 1946 and 1976. A clear parallelism can be established with the declining social status of Christian Democratic legislators (9). The increase in the PCI is much smaller, most probably because the starting point was already extremely high. The PSI is on the contrary rather stable. In any case at the end of the period examined here the number of late starters in their party involvement among Socialist and Christian Democratic legislators was still significantly higher than among Communists.

These data may be used also to put in a more exact perspective the meaning of the union experience we have examined before. The point

is to understand whether it can be interpreted as a political resource independent and even alternative with regard to party roles. The question is particularly relevant given the close relationship existing between unions and parties in Italy. It must be assessed which is the direction of influence between the two organizations. A combined analysis of union and party experience suggests that their mutual impact upon legislative careers is not the same for all political groups. PCI and DC legislators show rather diversified patterns, while Socialists fall somewhere in between. The fact that for most Communist legislators the active involvement in the party apparatus starts so early means that the union experience can hardly be conceived as an independent and primary source of political influence. It is much more an extension of their party career in keeping with the communist doctrine of the subordinate role of the party. To this we must add the high level of organizational concentration of the union experience that makes for a rather uniform and strict relationship between the two organizations. In the case of Christian Democratic and to a lesser extent Socialist legislators, being the party experience less extended, we may expect the union experience to have a greater autonomy. Moreover the fact that their union experience comes from a greater variety of organizations implies a more complex relationship between political resources gained from union and party involvement. The different types of unions represented among Christian Democratic legislators are to be considered as pressure groups trying to influence (often in opposite directions) the party rather than its extended arms in the society. While Communist legislators with a union experience can be considered by and large as party men in the unions, the Christian Democratic ones are more exactly characterized as union men in the unions, the Christian Democratic ones are more exactly characterized

as union men in the party. Not surprisingly the level of union offices held by the latter is generally higher than that of the former, a fact that points again to a more balanced relationship between resources linked to the two types of organizations in the DC (10).

A first evaluation of the data examined till now points to significant differences in the career and recruitment patterns of legislators with regard to the stages preceding their first parliamentary election. A first point that comes out clearly is that the relative weight of the two career stages examined is not the same for legislators of different parties. This can also be expressed by saying that the role played by external party organizations in the accumulation of career resources is not homogeneous within the parliamentary elite. While this role is overwhelming in the case of Communist legislators it is comparatively smaller in the case of Socialist and Christian Democratic legislators for whom other unrelated resources also play a role. To this should be added that the degree of uniformity in the recruitment patterns is not the same in the three parliamentary groups we have singled for analysis. PSI and DC show a certain degree of dualism that is not to be found in the PCI. In the Communist groups party-centered careers by far prevail; in the other two groups we find both party-centered careers and what we might term semi-party careers, i.e. careers for which the party organization plays a more limited and chronologically postponed role. These elements taken together suggest that the recruiting of members of parliament is in the Communist Party rather unquestionably controlled by the party apparatus, while in the other two parties it is the result of a more complex interaction between different factors, where the party apparatus is obviously important

but far from exclusive.

Diachronically we can detect some signs of a trend toward a greater similarity among the three parties. It is worth noting however that this has to do more with the fact that the role of the external party organization increased for Christian Democratic legislators than with the fact that it declined for their Communist colleagues.

This picture is not entirely new. Earlier studies on the Italian parliamentary class had already shown some of these aspects (Sartori, 1963). Moreover the fact that legislators of different parties show a certain degree of heterogeneity in their recruitment and career patterns might still have a limited impact upon the question, addressed in this article, for the overall working of the Italian political system. What we must now see is whether this heterogeneity extends further and affects the relationship between political elite and parliamentary institution. To do so it is time to look at the third stage of political careers, i.e. the one beginning when the parliamentary threshold is attained. How important is this new institutional phase of legislators' careers compared to the preceding ones? How strong can be its impact upon the social and political background that every member of parliament carries along? Obviously we have come here to the heart of the question of parliamentarization.

Some of the indicators suggested by Polsby in his analysis of parliamentary institutionalization (Polsby, 1968) may prove useful also in this context. The turnover of legislators and the length of their tenure, if we read them together with the data already discussed, provide a tool for assessing the relative weight of the

parliamentary stage within political careers. The data shown in table 1 and 2 can be read from two different points of view: the

Table 1 about here

subjective point of view of the career perspectives of individual politicians, but also the objective point of view of the structure of the collective body of legislators.

From the first viewpoint it is clear that the chances for a Christian Democratic politician (and increasingly also for a Socialist one), once he has been elected to parliament, to keep this position for a long period of time, say more than two legislatures, are much greater than for a Communist member (Table 2). The turnover in the first two parties is smaller and affects less the legislators with a

Table 2 about here

higher seniority. In the first two parties therefore, with the passing of time, being a legislator has become more and more a long-term engagement, while in the Communist party it has remained in most of the cases only a short term involvement.

The effects of this institutional experience and of its specific characteristics upon the politicians' perceptions of the political game and their actual behavior are deemed to be different. The first reason for this has to do with the mechanism of future expectations. DC and PSI politicians have come to expect to spend in parliament a rather long and central period of their political life and quite often even to end their career in this institution. It is reasonable to expect that much of their investment of attention, energies and involvement will be directed to the parliamentary institution and to the possibility of using it for building up their

political role. The expectations of a Communist politician are on average rather different: most probably after one or two terms in the national parliament he will move to other political positions in one of the branches of the party apparatus, or in one of the social organizations linked to the party (cooperatives, cultural centres, etc.); or else in local politics. His career ambitions are therefore much less confined to the parliamentary setting but extend beyond it. The fact that he is to face more frequently a relocation in his career means also that he will depend more heavily from the agency responsible for coordination of and recruitment to all these political institutions, i.e. the party organization. The second mechanism through which the length of tenure makes itself felt is the one based upon institutional learning, establishment of linkages, accumulation of resources and expertise. A shorter parliamentary career will inevitably interrupt such processes at a lower level than would be the case with longer tenures.

Therefore Communist legislators, compared to those of other parties, will be less able to capitalize for their political learning, linkages, resources and expertise from the parliamentary mandate. They will have to rely more on other political experiences (and this means to a great extent the party).

If we look now globally to the "mix" of party and parliamentary experiences in the careers of legislators of the three major parties a finding is rather clear: the balance between the two aspects varies greatly. On one side we have early and intensive party careers but generally short parliamentary careers (PCI), i.e. a party-centered career pattern (PCI); on the other side shorter and less exclusive party experiences and generally longer parliamentary

incumbencies, what we might call a mixed career pattern (DC and also to an increasing extent PSI). In the first case the process of resources accumulation is fundamentally centered in the external party organization which gains a firm hold upon recruitment; in the second case its nature is multi-centric and recruitment is much more loosely controlled by the party.

The same data lend themselves to be examined also from the collective point of view of the parliamentary party and its structure. The large number of legislators with a long parliamentary career and therefore powerfully entrenched in the institution suggests a more pluralistic and parliament-based power structure in the Christian Democratic and Socialist groups. First because the leaders of these parliamentary groups will necessarily be little more than primi inter pares with limited powers over their colleagues. Second because the external party leadership too will have for the same reasons a small leverage upon a parliamentary group made of a large number of legislators that are not under the threat of losing their seat. In the PCI, where only a small minority of legislators can count upon a long tenure, the power structure is clearly bound to be much more centralistic and vertical and also less parliament-based. It is reasonable to expect that the large majority of Communist members, staying in parliament only for one or two terms, will not be able to gain a position of authority (within the parliamentary institution) from which to challenge the group leadership and even less the external party leadership from which the first heavily depends. A clear hint of the different structures of the parliamentary groups comes from the fact that while the Christian Democratic

group during the thirty years examined here, changed 10 different presidents, the Communist group changed only three (and the first only because of death). Besides while the presidents of the first group have often been elected after contested elections, those of the second always went unopposed.

Further elements can be brought into this picture by investigating to what extent the different levels of renewal in the parliamentary class are the result of a complex play of different factors or on the contrary are under the control of the deliberate policies of the recruiting agency. As I said before this seems a crucial dimension for evaluating the meaning of the recruitment process. But in order to understand how the circulation of the parliamentary elites is produced we must first see under which form it takes place. Except for the few that die during their mandate, incumbent legislators leave the parliament either through retirement or because of electoral defeat. Given the Italian electoral system (PR with party slates and preference voting), the first case means not being included in one's party lists, the second that while having found a place in the electoral slates one does not get enough preferential votes to be reelected. The first alternative may in fact have two different meanings: voluntary retirement of the incumbent or forced retirement imposed by the agency controlling the formation of electoral slates (in Italy an interaction of local and national party offices). It is immediately clear that each of the three alternatives - voluntary retirement, forced retirement, electoral defeat - gives a different meaning to the renewal of the parliamentary class (Polsby, 1968; Herzog, 1975; Cotta, 1978).

By comparing the three parties we discover that the circulation of

their parliamentary personnel differs not only from the quantitative but also from the qualitative point of view. Once more the difference is between PCI on one side and DC and PSI on the other. In the PCI almost all incumbent members that find a place in the

Table 3 about here

party's electoral slates win reelection. This means that, except for the first elections after the war, the high turnover in the Communist parliamentary group has been assured almost entirely through the practice of retirement. Quite a different pattern predominates in the DC and the PSI: here very few incumbents retire but, at the same time, those running again sometimes face the risk of not being reelected (Table 3). Given these data a central point concerns the interpretation of retirements and in particular those of Communist members. A detailed scrutiny of the whole process of candidate selection is out of question here; however a very simple indicator as the age of retired members offers some clues for understanding the phenomenon. The chances that retirement will be the result of a free choice rather than forced are surely greater at an older age when a political career approaches its natural conclusion. The data for Socialist and Christian Democratic legislators show that retirements are increasingly associated with old age (in the last three elections examined in this study nearly 50% of them were due to members over sixty years); on the contrary in the Communist groups almost three quarters of retired members were below this age threshold.

All these data taken together fit rather well into two quite dif-

ferent parliamentary recruitment models. In the DC and PSI the recruitment process is highly deferential towards incumbents. The external party as a centralized unit has little willingness or power to dismiss them. The most important source for the limited turnover consists therefore in factional struggles backed by sections of the electorate using selectively the preference vote (as might be imagined not all voters make full use of the preference vote; only the more attentive ones or those mobilized by interest groups or party factions or the candidates themselves both to express one or more preferences) (Katz and Bardi, 1979). The recruitment model is rather decentralized and parliament-oriented. In the PCI on the contrary both renomination and electoral process (i.e. preference voting) are under strong party control and pay little attention to parliamentary positions. They also leave little room for decentralized influences. The role of the party, that we had found predominant in the pre-parliamentary stage of the careers of Communist legislators, continues to be paramount also in the parliamentary stage by controlling entry and exit in the institution.

The final step we have to make in order to understand more exactly the relationship between parliamentary groups and party organizations is to broaden a bit our picture of the political class. Until now we have considered only legislators, i.e. politicians identified by a parliamentary mandate. But in a country with highly structured parties as Italy this is not the only group of national politicians. To them must be added those holding national offices in the party organizations. For operational purposes I will consider as part of this group the members of the Central Committee (CC) of PCI and PSI and those of the National Council (CN) of the DC. It is interesting to notice that these party institutions are remarkably similar to parliaments, since they are elected assemblies to which

the national party executives are accountable very much as the cabinet is responsible toward parliament. We have thus for each party two analytically distinct groups of politicians: the members of the parliamentary groups and the members of the party assemblies. The first elected by citizens at large, the others by card carrying party members. Each group is therefore accountable to a different constituency and elected according to specific rules. In practice however the two groups are far from being reciprocally impenetrable. As the data for the period 1946-1976 show, in all three major parties there was some overlapping synchronic or diachronic - of the two institutional positions (Table 4).

Table 4 about here

What is the meaning in terms of political careers, party structures and party parliamentarization of the relationship between the two groups of politicians? A first point that can be made is that a greater overlapping between the two groups means a greater mutual indispensability of the two offices and at the same time a more open access from one to the other. It is politically desirable to hold both positions and it is relatively easier from one to reach also the other. A second point to be underlined is that the group of politicians that are able to cumulate both offices will enjoy a strategically preeminent position vis à vis their colleagues (11). Therefore the smaller this group the more centralized also the structure of the political elite.

If we compare DC and PCI politicians the overlapping between the two groups, whichever way we look at it, is greater in the first party than in the second. The PSI seems at first more puzzling; the overlapping seen from the point of view of the party assembly is even

smaller than in the Communist case, while from the point of view of the legislative assembly is easily found if we look at absolute figures: because of the poor electoral performance of the PSI after the second world war the group of party leaders is clearly oversized if compared to the relatively small number of the members of the parliamentary group. For a structural reason then the chances for members of the Socialist CC also to become members of the parliamentary group are smaller than the chances for the latter to gain access to the party assembly.

These data suggest that for Christian Democratic and especially Socialist legislators the access to their party national assembly is easier than for their Communist colleagues. As for the reverse relationship, the smaller percentage of members of the Communist CC, compared to members of the Christian Democratic CN, reaching a legislative position is probably to be explained with the limited rewards of a parliamentary career bound to be short (as we have seen this is the rule in the parliamentary group of the PCI) rather than with the selectiveness in the access to parliament.

For the reason mentioned before special attention should be given to the core group of politicians holding both party and parliamentary positions. From the data we have seen it can be noticed that this group is smaller in the PCI than in the DC and the PSI, suggesting a more centralized leadership in the first party. But a fuller understanding of this reality can be gained by looking at the dynamic aspects of this relationship between party and parliamentary positions. In this perspective we must trace the sequences between the two institutional positions. To establish to which degree one is a necessary path for reaching, the other helps to understand which

of the two institutions and which of the two groups of politicians can exert through its control over access to the other a predominance vis à vis the other. Looking at things from this point of view the difference between DC and PSI on one side and PCI on the other is particularly striking. Among Communist politicians having experienced both institutional positions an overwhelming majority (81%) have first become members of the party assembly and only later of parliament. On the contrary among Socialist and Christian Democratic politicians this career path was more or less as frequent as the opposite one (first parliament and then party assembly). The ratio between the two career lines was 52:48 in the DC and 56:44 in the PSI. These data mean that in the first party the fact of being a member of parliament does not open, except for very few cases, a viable road to top leadership positions. A fully developed party career is required before. In the other two parties on the contrary the role of the party position is by no means so exclusive in granting access to the highest political levels. A parliamentary seat can often help in supporting the ascent of a politician even within the party organization.

These findings add new weight to what we have already said about the relationship between party organization and parliamentary institution in the three parties examined here. DC and PSI show a marked degree of structural parliamentarization, as it appears from the fact that the parliamentary arena is in many ways a major institutional power base for the political elites expressed by them. This is not the case in the PCI where the party apparatus remains for most communist politicians the center of gravity of political life and parliament represents only a subordinate and temporally bounded engagement.

4. The unfinished institutionalization of the Italian parliament.

It is time now for a global evaluation of all these data. On the whole the picture they convey is pretty consistent. The Italian political elite has shown, throughout the post war period and even in recent years, a substantial degree of heterogeneity between the largest opposition party (PCI) and the other two major parties (DC and PSI). At the heart of this difference are clearly distinctive career and recruitment models. In the first party the careers of politicians are strongly marked by a dominant political experience: the one associated with the party apparatus. The party is by far the most prominent career channel and the whole recruiting process is strictly controlled and planned by this political structure with little room left for other influences. The result is a political class of great uniformity and at the same time structured according to a rather centralistic model (12). In the careers of politicians of the other two groups the party stage plays surely an important role (and a role which has become more important with time, particularly for the DC) but not so much as to prevent other experiences to have a significant impact. Accordingly the recruitment process, more than following a deliberate and planned scheme engineered by a centralized agency, is the result of a complex balance of different institutional pressures. The image of the Socialist and Christian Democratic political elites is therefore one of much greater diversities and of structural pluralism (and not surprisingly also of greater factionalism).

As we have repeatedly noticed the heterogeneity dividing the Italian political elites reflects different patterns of relations between parliamentary subsystem and party structures, or to be more specific

different levels of structural parliamentarization of the parties. The degree to which the institutional weight of parliament (with its specific identity) makes itself felt upon the politicians of each of the three parties and thus also upon their own structure varies significantly. To put it in the simplest terms, in the PCI the flow of influence is predominantly from the party apparatus to the parliamentary group, while in the DC and also in the PSI the flow goes both ways. This amounts to saying that the Communist Party has remained during the period considered here much less parliamentarized from a structural point of view than the other two major parties. We can therefore add to the sartorian interpretation of the Italian political system another element. The polarization of the party system is not confined only to the ideological level but is matched (and we might say reinforced) by a structural heterogeneity of the party unity as the analysis of their elite groups makes clear. This finding could stimulate some speculations, which we can not pursue here, about the possible links between the two dimensions. For example could't we hypothesize a relationship between the pace of change of the ideological dimension and the structural models of the parties and suggest that a less parliamentarized party, being more insulated from institutional pressures that might challenge its ideological stance, will be rather slow in the revision of its cultural positions? Or to put it more explicitly the ideological "diversity" of the PCI has not perhaps lasted longer precisely because of the structural "diversity" of the same party?

Coming back to our theme the situation just described seems relevant for the institutionalization of the Italian parliament. First of all from the point of view of its autonomy and institutional identity. To the extent that one of the major parties represented in parliament displays a limited degree of parliamentarization an important gap in the institution's boundaries exists. An external political actor is

able to dictate its influence directly upon a large section of the members of parliament without having to pay much attention to their institutional condition. The institutional identity of parliament will obviously be under strain insofar as the allegiance of part of its members has to go primarily to an external organization.

All this is not to say that the PCI regards the parliamentary arena as having little importance. Quite to the contrary. Being denied access to the cabinet for all these years the PCI has made an extensive and skilful use of parliament for furthering its own influence in the political system and has even developed a theory of the "centrality of parliament". On these bases many observers have inferred that its parliamentarization was achieved. But the evidence is not sufficient to support this judgement. In spite of its full exploitation of the legislative arena the PCI has been very careful to prevent its structure to be moulded by the parliamentary institution as we have seen through the analysis of its political class. That the PCI perceives itself as something different from a parliamentarized party, regarding the parliamentary arena as its central strategic and behavioral focus, is made clear by a slogan it has often used in recent years : "senza il PCI non si governa" (without the PCI Italy cannot be governed). This slogan explicitly declares that a parliamentary majority is not enough to support an effective government because the opposition can mount outside the parliament social pressures - for instance through the trade unions - that will stalemate the implementation of governmental policies. Thus the lower degree of structural parliamentarization of the PCI is reflected also in the strategic-behavioral dimension.

The effects of this situation touch also another dimension of the

institutionalization of parliament. Its internal coherence can not escape from being seriously affected by the fact that an important section of its membership responds to organizational and structural principles that transcend the institutional framework of parliament and are therefore basically different from those guiding the other parliamentary forces. On one side we have a parliamentary group guided by a small and cohesive leadership whose power rests mainly in the external party and against which there is little institutional leverage from inside the parliament for a counterbalancing pressure. On the other side we have political groups that function according to a dualistic model by which extra-parliamentary and intra-parliamentary powers have to reach a mutual adjustment in a deferential and coalitional way. That the parliamentary groups have different structures is clearly reflected by their voting patterns. While Communist members act very much as a cohesive voting block, both Socialist and Christian Democratic legislators are very often unable to preserve party unity on important issues. This explains why so often government legislation has to be passed with the support of the opposition in order to offset splits within the majority. (Cazzola, 1974).

To put it in more general terms this structural heterogeneity of parliamentary forces prevents the institution from working according to the principle of reciprocity (Di Palma, 1977). This becomes particularly clear when such a crucial question as that of government building is at stake. The fullest application of reciprocity in parliamentary life, i.e. alternation in government and opposition roles, has been for all this period out of question. But even more limited experiments have failed. Particularly in recent years the political forces have been faced with a sort of vicious circle. Governmental coalitions of DC and PSI (plus other minor parties), because of the decentralized and factionalized structure of these parties are

very weak against the cohesive opposition of the PCI controlling almost a third of parliamentary seats. As a consequence the proposal of winning the support of this party by incorporating it in a larger alliance has gained favor. Moreover the PCI, because of its centralised structure and the control it exerts over its parliamentary group, can show enough moderation in its policy programs to be perceived as an appealing coalition partner. Nevertheless when it has come to taking this step both DC and PSI have remained extremely cautious on the perspective of going all the way to a full coalition with the PCI. It is not difficult to understand that they fear that a cohesive party as the PCI by becoming a fullyfledged coalition partner could exploit their internal divisions and gain an hegemonic role in the government. If such things happened they would face the alternative of either seeing a permanent split in their own ranks or of having to denounce the coalition agreement. In both cases a deeper polarization would probably result and they would incur severe political losses.

These dilemmas became apparent when a coalition pact involving the PCI was in fact tried between 1976 and 1978. The agreement provided only for Communist support of the government, but the PCI was denied any ministerial position. Obviously while this very asymmetric solution suited the DC and also the PSI it could not satisfy for very long the PCI. It was therefore no surprise that this party soon moved back to its oppositon role asking at the same time for the future of full government partnership, which the other parties in their turn refused.

Thus the Italian impasse seems unable to find a stable solution. Each way being closed the short term tactics of survival prevail over the longer term strategies of governing as Di Palma aptly puts it.

All this is not to deny that changes have taken place in the Italian

parties during the thirty years we have examined. In fact important changes at the ideological level have occurred, contributing to a less tense confrontation in all political arenas. However along the dimensions examined here there is still a very serious lag. Until a more sustained change, which is not yet apparent in the PCI, will start bridging the structural heterogeneity highlighted in this analysis and all parties will have achieved a high level of parliamentarization, the perspectives of a deeper mutual trust between political forces will be - I am afraid - limited and extremely volatile. And the central institution of a democratic polity - the parliament - will lack a full institutionalization.

- 1) Czudnowski (1975) offers a broader definition of recruitment : "processes through which individuals are inducted into active political roles". But such a definition has the disadvantage of blurring the analytical distinction between ^{simple} political activation and assumption of institutional roles, between active citizens and members of the political elite.
- 2) The extreme case of negative parliamentarization is that of the revolutionary party which on all three dimensions diverges radically from the parliamentary institution and its ^{basic} principles.
- 3) For two different interpretations see Cotta (1976 and 1979) and Leonardi, Nanetti and Pasquino (1978).
- 4) The best analyses of values and strategic perspectives of Italian legislators are those by Putnam (1973) and Di Palma (1977); the latter provides also interesting data on their behavior. Both have ~~xxx~~ detected significant differences between legislators of different parties.
- 5) The breakdown of career stages suggested here is not entirely different, except for terminology, from the one proposed by Herzog (1975, chapter 3). Herzog distinguishes four phases: 1. Frühe politische Sozialisation; 2. Politische Rekrutierung; 3. Politische Karriere; 4. Elitenrekrutierung.
- 6) In order to make the comparison of the two class parties of the left (PCI and PSI) with the interclassistic party of the center (DC) meaningful I have included among "unions" not only workers unions but also farmers, shopowners and artisans organizations which play an important role particularly among DC legislators.
- 7) Among Communist legislators with a union experience between 62% and 77% (depending on the period) came from the single most important organization (CGIL); among Socialist legislators the percentage fell to about 50% (always from the CGIL); and among Christian Democratic legislators was only between 28% and 43% (in this case the union with the largest representation was the CISL).

- 8) The percentage of legislators with no party office before their first parliamentary election was as low as 2% for the PCI in the first legislature and has kept very stable over time. In the PSI it declined from 15% in the first legislature to 5% in the sixth; in the DC from 23% to 7%.
- 9) The election of the seventh legislature in 1976 shows however a reversal in this trend (Cotta, 1978). Probably a plateau has been reached in the degree of party saturation of the Christian Democratic parliamentary group and a reaction has started.
- 10) During the years between 1946 and 1976 more than 60% of DC legislators with a union experience came from offices of national level in these organizations, while the same happened for only little more than 40% of the Communist legislators (Cotta, 1979, chapter 3).
- 11) Evidence supporting this point is provided by the fact that the highest collegial authority (the Direzione) (in all the parties) is composed almost entirely by politicians that are members both of the party assembly and of the parliamentary group.
- 12) The structure of the Communist political class is therefore still consistent with the principle of "democratic centralism" that the PCI in spite of its ideological revisionism has not yet dropped.

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Table 1. Percentages of new elected members.

	Legislatures					
	1 (1948) ^a	2 (1953)	3 (1958)	4 (1963)	5 (1968)	6 (1972)
PCI	67%	28%	37%	49%	46%	47%
PSI	60%	47%	38%	31%	36%	28%
DC	46%	30%	35%	22%	31%	22%

a) percentages for the first legislature are calculated with regard to the Constituent Assembly elected in 1946.

Table 2. Members with a seniority of more than two terms^a (% for each group).

	Legislatures				
	2	3	4	5	6
PCI	24%	39%	24%	20%	18%
PSI	12%	30%	39%	33%	47%
DC	36%	44%	49%	53%	48%

a) the Constituent Assembly is counted as one term. The measure of the seniority counts also the ongoing term.

Table 3. Exit from parliament of incumbent legislators.

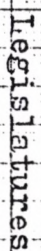
	Type of exit	Legislatures							
		1 → 2	2 → 3	3 → 4	4 → 5	5 → 6			
		%	%	%	%	%	N	N	N
FCI	Retirement	22 (7)	52 (26)	74 (31)	81 (50)	87 (56)			
	Electoral defeat	78 (25)	48 (24)	26 (11)	19 (12)	12 (8)			
	Total	100 (32)	100 (50)	100 (42)	100 (62)	100 (64)			
FSI	Retirement	18 (3)	30 (7)	35 (8)	35 (9)	14 (3)			
	Electoral defeat	82 (14)	70 (16)	65 (15)	65 (17)	86 (19)			
	Total	100 (17)	100 (23)	100 (23)	100 (26)	100 (22)			
DC	Retirement	16 (17)	35 (26)	25 (14)	38 (20)	49 (27)			
	Electoral defeat	84 (91)	65 (46)	75 (41)	62 (32)	51 (28)			
	Total	100 (108)	100 (74)	100 (55)	100 (52)	100 (55)			

Table 4.. Relationship between party leadership and parliamentary elite (1946-1976).

	PCI		PSI		DC	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Members of party assembly only	58	(244)	63	(305)	40	(248)
Members of party assembly and of parliament ^a	42	(178)	37	(178)	60	(367)
Total members of party assembly	100	(422)	100	(483)	100	(615)
<hr/>						
Members of lower chamber only	72	(396)	48	(113)	61	(470)
Members of lower chamber and party assembly	28	(152)	52	(122)	39	(295)
Total members of lower chamber	100	(548)	100	(235)	100	(765)

a) Here both chambers are considered.

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3,4,5,6 are designated the Constituent Assembly elected in 1946, and the following normal parliaments elected in 1948, 1953, 1958, 1963, 1968, 1972.

Fig. 3 Union Experience (% of legislators with union office).

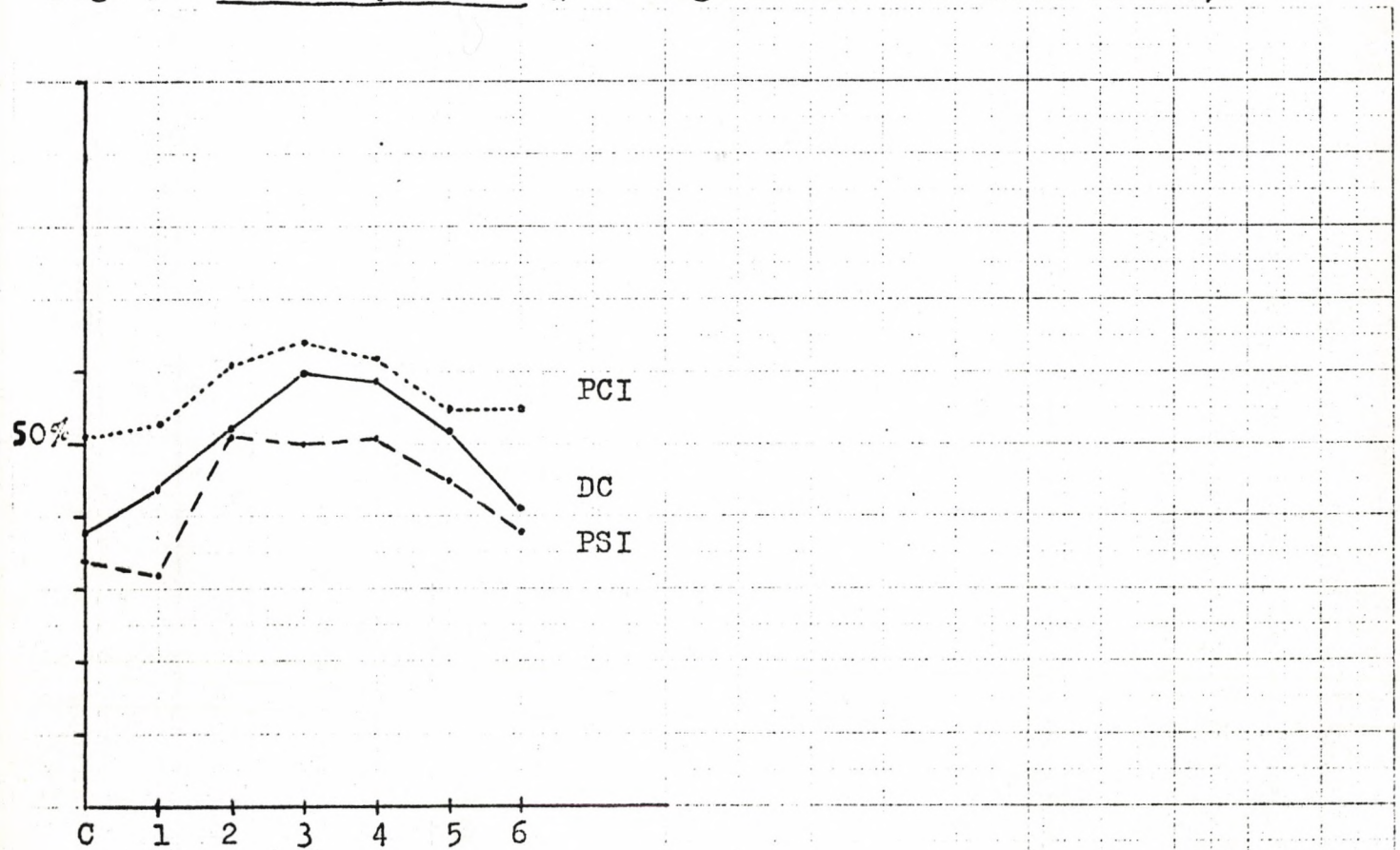
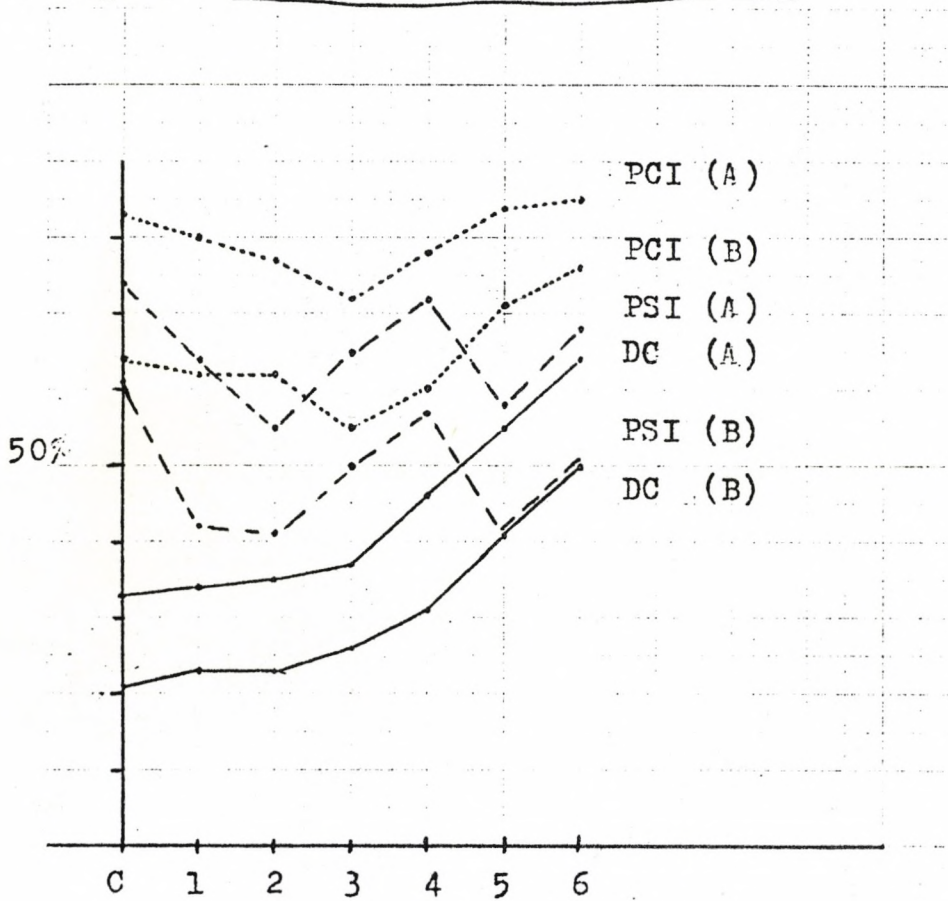


Fig. 4 Party careers of legislators.



(A) : % who joined party before age of 25

(B) : % with first party office before the age of 25

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