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Common Interest vs. Uncommon Enmity

The Transition from Informal „Familienpolitik" to Formal Political Association

The ethnographic research into rural European communities, especially out of a cultural or social anthropological tradition, has paid great attention to intracommunity strife (Banfield, 1958; Blok, 1975; Boissevain, 1974; Frankenberg, 1957; Freemann, 1970; Higonnet, 1971; Laumann, 1976; Loizos, 1975; Morin, 1970; Pescatello, 1976; Powel, 1970; Stacey, 1975; Valen, 1964; Williams, 1956). Factions, political parties and even moieties (Naroll, 1962) are described as divisive yet decisive factors in almost all realms of social behavior. Somewhat paradoxically, however, rural Europe has also been credited with a long history of numerous organizations whose major purposes have been more or less voluntary cooperation in pursuit of common interests (Anderson and Anderson, 1959; 1962; Anderson, 1971; 1973). The existence of cooperation through formal association, despite a general milieu of acrimonious internal factionalism, would seem to require explanation. In this paper I hope to contribute to an understanding of this apparent paradox by providing a contemporary European example of the dynamic relationship between these two phenomena during a period of economic development and social change.

In 1974-75, my wife and I carried out research in Ausserberg, (population 725 in 1975), a rural Alpine community in the Southern Swiss Canton of Valais (Muehlbauer, 1979).[1] The community's parameters can be defined by the "commune", the smallest politically viable Swiss territorial unit. The primary goal of our study was to add to the understanding of social change in rural communities as it occurs in relation to processes of industrialization and technological modernization. Investigative procedures included participant observation techniques and archival research.

We chose Ausserberg as our research locale for several reasons. Preliminary investigation had indicated the possible presence of a complex of common interest associations, which we had determined to investigate, as well as conditions of economic transformation from agricultural pursuits to industrial wage labor. An influx of commercial and industrial organizations into Valais since 1900 stimulated a move from a local economy based of self-sufficiency and subsistence agropastoralism to an "Arbeiter-Bauer" economic pattern, or part-time farming combined with full-time non-agricultural wage labor. This economic transformation in turn precipitated social changes, among them the development of common interest associations, an intensification and formalization of local factional strife, and the development of new leadership. In

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addition, the existence of a 1910 community study of the same commune, reported in the monograph *Sonnige Halden am Lötschberg* (The Sunny Slopes of the Lötschberg Mountains) (Stebler, 1913) enhanced our interest, since it provided a convenient historical baseline for our project.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

It is useful at this point to define what I mean by common interest association. Proably the most salient defining criteria are contained in the term itself. All individuals who share some attribute, such as age, sex, or occupation, together constitute an unorganized social aggregate, that is, a social category. As a category they are likely to have similar or common interests based on their common attributes. When people become aware of their common interest as well as attributes, they often organize to take action in pursuit of those interests (Schurtz, 1902; Silverberg, 1978). The result is the kind of organization I call a "common interest association".

Common interest associations are particularly able to operate effectively within complex societies which feature economic and social differentiation, occupational specialization, governmental and commercial bureaucracies, and an industrial economic order. The mutually supportive efforts and financial contributions of a large number of people joined together in pursuit of their common interests not only add numerical strength, but also the ability to establish and support an administrative group or bureaucracy, as well as specialists from within or outside the association proper.

Anderson notes the particular advantages of the common interest association in industrial societies when he points out that it often adopts a rational-legal mode of operation:

> written statutes clearly define membership, participant obligations, leadership roles, and conditions of convocation. It normally possesses a legally recognized corporate identity. It is rational in the sense that as a body it is geared to efficiency in making decisions and taking action, particularly as leaders are, in principle at least, impartially chosen by election of the most qualified to take office. It is legal in the sense that compliance in decisions and actions is sanctioned by the impersonal force of law (1971:18).

To conclude, I would briefly define a common interest association as a formal organization, often adopting a rational-legal mode of operation, whose membership is drawn from among the occupants of a common social category and who therefore share common interests and goals, and who have organized to pursue those goals.

TYPOLOGY OF COMMON INTEREST ASSOCIATIONS

In attempting to understand how they cope with the effects of industrialization and technological modernization, it will be beneficial to recognize different types of common interest associations in terms of their sociological and psychological functions. Typologies in terms of function have been devised before, the most well-known being the revision by Gordon and Babchuck (1959) or Rose (1954). The revised version posits "instrumental" associations, or those which operate to "maintain or create some normative condition of change" and are concerned with conditions outside the organization; "expressive" associations, which provide "continuing gratification" to members within the context of the organization; and "instrumental-expressive" associations, which combine the functions of the first two types.

Drawing somewhat from the above classification, but considering the needs of my own research, I will utilize the following typology of common interest associations:

Utilitarian
– concerned with the economic and/or political interests of the members.

Non-utilitarian
Recreational/social – concerned with gratification for the members through such non-economic or political activities as sports, music, etc.

Community service – concerned with interests of people other than the members, as in charitable or community service associations.

The basis of this typology is the primary and manifest function of an association, that is, the obvious and avowed purpose for its existence. The classification will not preclude us from identifying the less obvious and secondary functions of any particular organization.

TRADITIONAL AUSSERBERG

Ausserberg lies on the massive southern flank of the Lötschberg mountain chain, a section of the Bernese Alps. Because it faces south, this flank is known as the sunny slope, as in the title of Stebler's monograph. Along the southern edge of this flank stretches the valley of the Rhone river. Ausserberg's territorial limits coincide with four natural boundaries on the sunny slope: the valley floor, at 640 m, the peak of the 3,000 m high Wiwannihorn, and the two narrow, uninhabited valleys, the Bietschtal and the Baltschiedertal, which form Ausserberg's west and east boundaries respectively. These

valleys contain small tributary streams which carry runoff from the Bietsch glacier into the Rhone.

Ausserberg's total land area is 1,527 hectares (*Arealstatistik der Schweiz*, 1953). Within this territory lie forest, meadow, rocky slope, alpine meadow, cropland, and the physical trappings of human habitation. At approximately 1,100 m, and equidistant between the two lateral valleys, there is a cluster of residences and agricultural buildings which make up a central population aggregate known as Trogdorf. Several adjacent building clusters represent former hamlets, which in recent times have expanded to the point where an uninformed observer would have a difficult time discerning where one residential area ends and the other begins.

The approximately 450 residents of 1900 Ausserberg practiced a form of agropastoralism known as *Alpwirtschaft*. *Alpwirtschaft* is characterized by the seasonal vertical movement of livestock – particularly cattle and sheep – and labor force, allowing exploitation of the land in altitudinal zones as they reach their peak or peaks of productivity at different times of the year. In Ausserberg, livestock were fed in stalls during the winter, pastured around the central residential cluster in spring and fall and "summered" on high grasslands (alpages) above the timber line. Rye, potatoes, fruit, and garden vegetables constituted the major cultigens. Grapes were grown for wine production. Due to the isolation of the region and the meager productivity of a fairly primitive technology in a harsh physical habitat, Ausserberg's economy was at a subsistence level. Extremely low precipitation, combined with strong winds and the effects of the sun's rays hitting perpendicularly against the mountain side, made this area one of the dryest in central Europe. Household and commune self sufficiency were ideals, although emigration and population control techniques such as late marriage and self-imposed celibacy testified to the limitations of human habitation in a harsh environment. As a result, as far back as the 13th century the population strove to tap springs and glacial streams for water for irrigation and direct human and animal consumption (Bielander, 1944:519). It was at that time that the requirements of survival dictated the formation of the earliest common interest associations, ultimately leading to the formal incorporation of the coresidents of a geographical area as coowners and coexploiters of essential natural resources such as forests, alpages, water, and paths (Netting, 1976: 145; Niederer, 1956:31-38).

The political commune of 1900 Ausserberg was essentially coterminus with the *Bürgerschaft*, an utilitarian common interest association which preceeded the commune as a political unit. It probably originated in the 14th century, and retained much the same form into the 20th century (Niederer, 1956:38). Its existence can be explained by the need for suprahousehold co-

operation in certain production oriented endeavors, as well as the advantages of the productive efficiency which results from joint effort. The *Bürgerschaft*, in turn, was probably preceeded by *Geteilschaften* – utilitarian associations which were limited to the joint exploitation, and possibly ownership, of a single resource (Niederer, 1956:39). The *Alpgenossenschaft*, an association concerned with the joint exploitation of alpages, is an example of a *Geteilschaft*. A functional interpretation of its existence lies in the practicability of communal tenure on an alpage. The common grazing of cattle over a summer on alpage pasture land makes good sense in terms of labor economics. A large herd can be tended and cheese can be produced by a few individuals, thereby allowing the rest of the owners time for other tasks. Joint ownership and control also aid in regulating use and preventing outsiders from usurping the alpage (Netting, 1976:140-145).

This cooperative emphasis on the organization of production was also symbolically represented. Under the spiritual umbrella of Roman Catholocism and the guidance of a resident priest, the people of Ausserberg expressed the ideal of community harmony and cooperation through both ritual and politics. Religious ceremony – mass, feast-day processionals, and funerals – drew the participation of the entire population. The political system – the democratic election of officials and the business of local government – was not encumbered by ideological divisions. One regional party, the Catholic Conservative Party, held the unofficial allegiance of the vast majority. Supporting the ideology of harmony were three social facts, as follows: most people were at least distantly related, reflecting a high rate of commune endogamy; all children inherited equal shares of their parents' property; differences in wealth were not great – people generally considered themselves to be equally poor. These latter two situations reduced the potential for divisiveness as a function of economic class differentiation.

The image of a conflict-free community is misleading, however. Beneath the surface expression of harmony festered a pervasive hostility which influenced nearly all aspects of community life. Ausserberg, and indeed most Alpine communes, had two large, mutually hostile factions, each revolving around one individual or group of male relatives, usually brothers (Weinberg, 1976; Weiss, 1946; Windisch, 1976; Friedl, 1974; Möller, 1965). Such factions represented informal alliances of relatives ("Geschlecht") or groups of relatives, and a few non-related households. These alliances were held together as much by animosity toward members of the other faction as by affinity for members of their own group.

The ostensible reasons for factionalism were ancient wrongs committed against the members of one faction by the members of the other. Such wrongs included moving property boundary markers, stealing water, blocking

someone's path to political positions, or "slander", that is, accusations against someone as a perpetrator of the aforementioned overt acts. In all probability, intense competition for scarce resources – land, water, and other means of production – in the hostile Alpine natural environment generated much of this conflict.

The scarcity of necessary natural resources for everyone generally led to a hostile atmosphere among neighbors, a hostility which was channeled through the framework of the factions. Despite superficial amiability, however, it is likely that even within factions individuals may have regarded each other with caution and potential jealousy. The evil eye was known and, in keeping with Foster's "Image of Limited Good" (1965), one man's gain was viewed as everybody else's loss. Given the circumscribed nature of the local agricultural resource base, the image was undoubtedly not far from reality. Modern informants have indicated that intense jealousy and suspicion are still prevalent among older (middle-aged and up) residents, especially the poorer ones.

Whatever the origin of the factions, their mutually antagonistic behavior influenced almost all areas of commune life. Specific details of events related to factional feuding are difficult to acquire, primarily because the local ideal of community harmony still stimulates the desire to present an ideal picture of the commune to outsiders. Nevertheless, some facts are available. Hostile relations led people to avoid contact with each other. Some did not speak to each other. Factions were ideally endogamous, although intermarrying did occur and resulted in some shifting of factional affiliation. Strong opposition to intermarrying existed among parents, some of whom, when their children occasionally did marry across factional boundaries, were forced to confront people whom they had managed to avoid for years.

Factional infighting usually peaked around the time of commune elections, since intense competition for the official commune leadership positions – especially that of president – existed. The position of president allowed its incumbent to wield great power in commune affairs. A primary official source of his power was the legal strenght of the commune, combined with the official rights of the president. Within the commune, this meant that the president could appoint people to valued, part-time paid positions, such as forester and police functionary, the latter being paid through the fines he assessed. These were essentially patronage positions. The president also wielded great influence in the selection of teachers. Further, non-remunerated positions such as commission membership – school, public works, church, etc. – depended on the president's approval. These prominent offices were often sought by people wanting to move up in commune government. The president could also grant unofficial favors through mani-

pulation of commune government. Fines could be forgotten, and minor infractions could be overlooked.

In dealing with cantonal government authorities, the president was virtually all-powerful. This situation resulted from the fact that any official business between communes and cantonal government required the president's approval. Cantonal authorities would deal only with the commune president in such matters as granting permission to build houses or agricultural buildings, contributions to local organizations, support for agropastoral farming operations, and so on. A letter from the president could also open doors for people who wanted to get into special schools or find work outside the commune.

THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL TRANSITION

By far the greatest impetus to change in Ausserberg came from the building of the Bern-Lötschberg-Simplon railroad between 1907 and 1913, linking Bern, Switzerland's capital, in the north with the Bernese Oberland and Upper Valais in the south. Brig, located in the Rhone valley approximately 10 kilometers east of Ausserberg, became the railroad's southern terminus, linking it with an earlier route to Italy and Geneva. More important for Ausserberg, which lay along the railroad's route and was granted its own station in 1913, it brought the opportunity for entry into a wage labor economy and opened the entire region to technological modernization and capitalistic economic development. Another railroad, completed in 1878, which ran along the Rhone river from Geneva to Brig, along with the canalization of the Rhone, provided similar benefits for much of the region and generally contributed to its economic development.

The transformation of the local economy took place relatively gradually over about 50 years. At first people resisted wage labor – only the land-poor or a few far-sighted individuals would work for wages away from the soil. The introduction of new consumable goods and the possibility of earning the cash to buy them, however, eventually convinced most households to combine wage labor with agropastoralism. By the 1960's the *Arbeiter-Bauer* economy was in full bloom, while the children of worker-farmers were even training for and entering white collar professions and skilled blue collar trades (Muehlbauer, 1979).

Employment opportunities increased tremendously with accelerated development. The railroad brought factories, tourism, and the service industries which they generate (Suter, 1947). The local population, no longer restric-

ted by the limitations of a primitive agricultural technology in a harsh habitat, increased tremendously. Visp, the nearby city where many Ausserbergers worked, grew from an agricultural village of approximately 600 in the 19th century to a small city of nearly 3,000 in 1950 and over 5,000 in 1970. Ausserberg's population nearly doubled to over 700 in 1970. These increases subsequently stimulated a large and important construction industry which built new roads as well as new houses. While private capital was financing housing, public larders, enlarged by the increased tax revenue which the new economy allowed, were paying for an improved transportation system. Automobiles made their debut in Ausserberg in 1964.

Concomitant with these economic and technological changes, and to a great extent as a result of them, the commune underwent a significant social transformation.

In order to understand the processes underlying these developments, each social change should be examined in light of the economic change which may have directly or indirectly given rise to it. I will make such an examination under three headings: the emergence of new common interest associations, the intensification and formalization of commune factions, and the emergence of new leaders in the commune.

THE EMERGENCE OF NEW COMMON INTEREST ASSOCIATIONS

The formation of new common interest associations can be explained by their fulfillment of two functions. One, through the cooperative efficiency and rationality of organizations that are formal, even legal, and in some cases linked to similar organizations at a regional or national level, they met essential needs formerly met through agropastoral subsistence production by largely self-sufficient households. Two, they helped maintain a viable community — one which provides individuals with effectively interesting activities as well as with outlets for prestige aggrandizement — in a commune under threat of competition from commercialized activites emanating from outside the commune.

Fulfillment of Essential Needs. As welcome and genuinely beneficial to commune life as the introduction of wage labor may have been, it also posed a threat. Certain local organizations became unable to adequately perform their traditional functions, or were poorly equipped to take complete advantage of the new economic opportunities presented by modernization.

The traditional household and its agropastoral farming operation came directly under attack by the introduction of wage labor. With the men of the household away for twelve or more hours a day, self-sufficiency in terms of subsistence was no longer feasible. Just as their ancestors turned to utilitarian common interest associations in order to adapt to the new problems of subsisting in an mountainous environment, the people of Ausserberg utilized this form of social organization to adjust the problems imposed by the advent of a new economic system.

Grocery Cooperative: The establishment of two grocery cooperatives, one in the early 1900's which lasted only a few years, and one founded in the 1940's, were deliberate attempts to offset the decline in self-sufficiency on the part of the commune's households and the commune generally. With people spending more and more time away from home and the farm operation, they were able to produce fewer and fewer of their own food supplies. The people of Ausserberg were entering an economic system characterized by specialization in the production of essential commodities. They responded by forming an association which, by facilitating the procurement of food and other essentials, allowed them to remain in the mountains, and helped to preserve their mountain households and their community.

In addition to its function of preserving the traditional household, the cooperative even enhanced its quality as a place where food and other products are consumed. This latter benefit was made possible through links to organizations beyond the local level. The connection with a national cooperative chain, whose agents dealt with the cooperative's governing council and especially with its director, brought in a variety and quality of food and other consumer goods previously unavailable or even unknown in the commune.

Breeders Associations: The growth of wage labor eventually also brought about a division in the commune between workers and agriculturalists which was both economic and political. With people gradually moving away from full-time agropastoralism, the commune was less likely as a political body to devote tax money to purely agropastoral interests, such as maintenance of breeding stock. As a response to this situation, in the 1930's breeder's associations were formed which took up the specific breeding tasks formerly handled by the political commune. Like the grocery cooperative, they too had outside connections through a canton-wide association of similar organizations. Through these links, the remaining agropastoral operations had access to better breeding and maintenance techniques, thus increasing the effectiveness of the remaining agropastoral operations.

The breeder's associations, for those wishing to maintain the old subsistence economy, and the grocery cooperative were responses to the decline in self-sufficiency. By providing services no longer feasible in the context of the household or the commune, they operated to augment and maintain the older organizations, and, further, to allow the population to remain in the mountains.

Credit Union and *Health Insurance Association:* A credit union and health insurance association, established in the late 1920's and early 1930's, went beyond the traditional household and the commune in advancing living conditions. Both were able to take advantage of a cash economy, thereby replacing and improving on the kinds of assistance previously available through household, kindred, and the commune.

In the past, loans for business ventures or land purchases had been obtained from close relatives, often people who had made fortunes after leaving the commune. The credit union made local financing for property and machinery procurement possible, and more secure, at least until the association became a pawn in factional infighting. Such purchases led to an upgrading of agropastoralism in Ausserberg. The health insurance association greatly increased people's chances to obtain newly available modern medical care, and their ability to avoid complete financial ruin resulting from long term or drastic illness.

Travel Association: While not directly related to the decline of household or commune self-sufficiency, the establishment of a travel association by hotel and chalet owners adds insight into the advantage of formal collective action. The advent of touristry along the south ramp of the Lötschberg railroad brought new entrepreneurial and wage labor opportunities to Ausserberg. The travel association aided local property owners in developing this income augmenting business activity. It did so through its contacts with professional touristry agents of the Lötschberg railroad, leading to an upgrading of tourist advertising and facilities. By cultivating a purely local source of economic support, this association helped transform the commune's natural features into profitable, non-agricultural resources. In terms of preserving the economic viability of the commune, the commercialization of this innate source of revenue proved extremely beneficial, with potential for even greater development in the future.

Outlets for Prestige Aggandizement. In addition to the utilitarian associations, the 20th century witnessed the founding of a large number of recreational/social and service oriented organizations. In the 1920's brass band association and a yodeling club were formed, while the traditional drum and fife corps gained members and prominence. A marksman club changed its

function, becoming an important and prestigious service organization devoted to organizing and directing two large processions held each summer. During the late 1940's and early 1950's an especially influential priest led in the founding of both single and multi-purpose youth and adult religious associations. The 1960's saw the birth of a large number of new organizations, among them two sports clubs, a women's gymnastics group, and a chapter of the Swiss Alpine Club.

These events provide insight into a psychological function of both the utilitarian and non-utilitarian associations. Furthermore, an understanding of this psychological function can help explain the existence of the non-utilitarian. As the men of Ausserberg entered into outside employment, they found both their autonomy and self-respect under attack. The type of jobs they took, and were qualified to take, with few exceptions, left them at the bottom of the factory or railroad hierarchy.

The associations back home, however, provided them with positions of authority and honor, at the local level at least, and perhaps also at the regional, cantonal, or even national level. This latter situation was especially true of recreational/social associations, where prestige beyond the local level was acquirable and acquired by men from Ausserberg in cantonal and national competitions. For example, several individuals from the commune became national champions as drummers in drum and fife competitions.

Today there are still many people who do not hold highly valued occupational statuses outside the commune, thus making leadership in the commune attractive to them. Competition for local authority positions is fierce among them, since they have little outside the commune to offer them prestige or a sense of importance. The commune president in 1975, for example, was a furniture sales clerk.

Some men have achieved great local prestige and acclaim through their attainment of even minor positions of authority in outside work organizations, although in recent years increasing numbers of people from Ausserberg have held genuinely high prestige statuses by even national measures. Though they tend to leave the commune for various reasons, those who stay usually decline to take leadership roles in local organizations. Some informants lamented to me that few "intelligent or well educated" individuals want to serve on the commune council, for example.

This is not to say, however, that people who live in the commune and who also have high prestige positions outside are not interested in commune associations or dealings within the government. They do participate in the activities that interest them, but often reject time-consuming leadership posi-

tions. In the political arena they simply feel satisfied to work for their own local concerns through others who have the greater motivation and interest to participate.

Providing Affectively Interesting Activities. The 1950's and 1960's were periods when increased commuting and the affluence associated with it, combined with the growth of the valley cities Brig and Visp and their commercial attractions, posed a threat to the commune as a viable "community". Commune residents, especially young people, began to spend an increasing amount of time outside of Ausserberg. The comments of informants and the documented complaints of the commune's youth indicate that the local people were not ignorant of the need to create interesting things to do in the commune.

Today, certain categories of individuals – those with businesses in the commune, people with low prestige jobs outside the commune, priests who fear the loss of control over their flock – have the most to gain from perpetuating the idea of community in Ausserberg. Some may even be perceptive enough to anticipate the gradual destruction of the commune's unique identity through the erosion of qualities which are a source of pride, particularly because they are thought of as being accorded regional recognition. Such qualities include distinctive speech and customs, and such less tangible traits which contribute to personal pride through group achievement as leadership, entrepreneurial ability, intelligence, musical talent, and so on. Those who have most to gain in this regard will work to strengthen the commune and its identity, especially through the promotion of non-utilitarian common interest associations.

Associations compete with and hold their own against attractions outside the commune. Associational activity makes Ausserberg interesting – for those who enjoy the activites for their own sake, for those who enjoy the social aspects beyond the espoused functions of the association (yearly or bi-yearly festive gatherings, for example), and for those who benefit from prestige acquired through occupying authority positions.

INTENSIFICATION AND FORMALIZATION OF COMMUNE FACTIONS

Factions, as alliances of individuals and relatives, shifted in composition and intensified their activity in the competition for new resources – jobs, new local business, tax money, and government programs. They realigned their membership and intensified their activites in two ways. One, they for-

malized as political associations linked with regional political parties, thereby providing useful contacts with outside governmental organizations, and locally, enhancing the effectiveness of political action. Two, they founded parallel associations (except where some activity required the cooperation of the entire commune) whose competing activities helped to define and emphasize factional boundaries to so recruit marginally committed individuals.

Competition for New Resources. Factionalism in Ausserberg had always been characterized by competition for resources – land, water, political position and the advantages it could bring. As industry and commerce brought increased wealth to Valais, it subsequently generated additional resources on the local level. Specifically, these were as follows: jobs, especcially when local people controlled or influenced hiring; tax revenué, which funded government spending on technological improvements; the growth of local government itself as an employer; and entrepreneurial opportunities in commercial enterprises and construction-related businesses.

The increased population of the commune may have played a role in intensifying competition for resources. Although resources increased, if the population increase was greater relative to the resource base, one could expect an intensification of factional competition. Since measurement of resources relative to population is nearly impossible for the 1900 baseline Ausserberg, specific conclusions along these lines must be conjectural at best. However, there are some indications that factional competition for resources did indeed increase. It is possible to interpret the formation of two political parties, the further polarization of the formation of parallel recreational/social associations, and other forms of dualism as indicative of such a situation.

It is important to note here that the office of commune president became even more powerful than it had been traditionally, primarily because control over expanding commune resources was vested in the president. Especially for those residents who did not have important sources of revenue outside the commune, the political favors made possible by an expanding economy – patronage type jobs, letters of reference, government services – were particularly desirable. As a result, factional competition intensified its focus on the commune presidency. Significantly, a second political party in Ausserberg was born of a dispute over succession to that position.

Factionalism and Party Politics. Ausserberg was able to "resist" formalization of its factions and to perpetuate its show of community unity and harmony until fairly late in the development of two-party politics in the rest of German-speaking Valais. Political changes in Ausserberg were part of a general trend occuring throughout the region at that time.

Two-party politics in German-speaking Valais had its genesis during the latter part of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. The Catholic Conservative party was at that time officially divided into two branch parties which functioned only in commune government and the Cantonal parliament. In the Cantonal Executive and on the national level, the two operated as a single party. The expressed reason for the addition of a branch party, the Social Christians, was to neutralize the influence of the Social Democrats, who had supposedly threatened to make "radical" inroads among the incipient working class.

Whether the formation of a second party, representing a new social class, really accomplished the intended goal, assuming a real threat, is not clear to me. What does seem to have occurred, though, is that the large minority factions in larger communes in Valais were able to make use of an official organization at the cantonal level to support their interests at the local level, the level of "family politics". These "official" community divisions organized and formalized factional infighting at the local level, with ramifications at the cantonal level, rather than the other way around, as one might expect. The political party in the mountain communes, then, should be viewed as a multipurpose, utilitarian common interest association which gives formal expression to the local, informal factions.

In Ausserberg itself, during a period of increasing resources, a large minority alliance of dissatisfied citizens, having little political recourse under the traditional one-party system, were able to effectively organize a rebellion against the dominant faction. In 1956 they formed their own political party, subsequently forcing changes in the official electoral process. One change was the guarantee that the Social Christian party would have representatives on the commune's governing council proportional to their numbers in the commune. From then on the minority faction in Ausserberg had a formal structure of its own, with its own bureaucracy and links at the cantonal level of governemt. The overt expression of a division in the commune also allowed more or less open recruitment of non-committed individuals to both factions.

The formation of a two-party system was followed by further manifestations of dualism in the commune. Recreational/social associations began to cater exclusively to sympathizers of one party or the other. The *Jodler Klub* was such an association. Some, such as the sports clubs, even had completely duplicatory functions. Dualism is so marked today that people of each party patronize only "their" restaurant, that is, the one owned by an affiliate of their own party.

The brass band and the drum and fife corps, both large, popular and prominent, resisted political polarization through the mid 1970's. This fact is probably due to their function as community service organizations, along with the function as recreational/social associations. From the perspective of commune residents, these associations existed almost exclusively to provide essential ritual and entertainment contributions to public ceremonies. In keeping with the ideals of cooperation and harmony associated with these events, then, people would avoid politicizing them. In a 1978 visit to the commune, however, I discovered that these organizations had also become associated more or less exclusively with one or the other party.

It appears that the dualism just discussed serves to identify and recruit party sympathizers. While the data do not conclusively support this interpretation of the function of dualism, they strongly suggest it. There is a great concern with knowing where people stand relative to the two factions. Identification of someone as an associate of one party or the other usually follows that person's participation in a party-affiliated association. Dualism arose at a time when many people could obtain economic support outside the influence of local leaders and could thereby avoid making a commitment to either faction. The recreational/social association, then, might well serve to attract marginal people to a particular party.

THE EMERGENCE OF NEW LEADERS IN THE COMMUNE

New leaders emerged through the increased wealth, control over new resources, and heightened prestige of those, who, through relative poverty or foresight, were the first to engage in wage labor. They played critical roles in the founding of new associations and in the redefining of factional boundaries.

The New Leaders. The most visible of the commune's political leaders during the 1920's through the 1940's were among the individuals who were the first to engage in wage labor. Each of them accomplished more than greater affluence, however. Their early entry gave them an edge in controlling and sometimes developing new resources. One leader, the director of the first grocery cooperative, allowed that organization to fold. He then founded his own store. The extension of credit for purchases subsequently became a source of influence for him. Store ownership, and also supervisory positions with the major employers of the day, proved essential in providing these early leaders with a political following through the creation of economic dependencies. Often, however, these lines of influence extended primarily through kinship networks, a traditional source of influence.

By the 1950's, with the declining importance of the railroad as an employer and the advent of the grocery cooperative, construction company owners gained prominence as employers and as influential men in the political arena. (On the other hand, jobs for small-time entrepreneurs were meted out by the commune, increasing the importance of official political leadership in the distribution of resources.) Professional men, especially teachers, also played a significant role in commune politics. While teachers were always important figures, the commune seldom had more than one or two. With increasing educational opportunities, though, more people from Ausserberg became teachers and found employment outside the commune. Resident teachers who worked outside the commune were significant forces in the formation and later support of the Social Christian Party, for example.

Their Roles in Founding New Associations. The leaders of the two traditional factions during the early years of a wage labor economy were esteemed individuals. The source of their prestige was most likely their ability to take the best advantage of the new economy as higher level employees and entrepreneurs. In retrospect, however, they are remembered for their contributions as leaders in the development of new associations and in bringing about technological modernization.

Most of the associations formed before 1940 had great input from the older faction leaders, such as the individual mentioned earlier in conjunction with the first grocery cooperative. Through his position as leader of the dominant faction, commune president, and ally of the influential priest, he coordinated the formation of the brass band association, the credit union, and the health insurance association, in addition to his role as cooperative founder and director.

Whereas early association formation tended to serve the interests of people who were already in positions of power, by the 1940's new means of economic support and advancement -- trades, construction, teaching, and so on -- allowed people to challenge the older authority. The contentious founding of a grocery cooperative occurred at a time of factional disorganization which was induced by the growing industrial and commercial economy. Both new freedom and new dependencies meant shifting factional allegiances and opportunities for new leadership to emerge. New leaders were able to mold an alliance opposed to the older leaders of both factions, because both of these men were losing their control over former dependents. One such leader was a schoolteacher, a man who helped form the grocery cooperative.

Although he served briefly on the commune council in the 1940's, the schoolteacher's opportunities in, and contributions to, important commune

events were in utilitarian associations, where he contributed to the establishment and direction of the 1940's grocery cooperative, and later the travel association. Without the occupational opportunity opened to him through the new economy, it is doubtful that he could have accomplished any of this.

Under a system of subsistence agropastoralism and self-sufficient production, the schoolteacher would probably not have been able to remain in the commune. If he had remained, he would clearly have lacked the normal basis for prestige and position: with landed wealth or a large number of close male relatives operating their own self-sufficient households. In his youth he worked as a mason on various projects made possible by economic development. As a mason and later a schoolteacher, he could rely on outside income for support, and could in fact obtain prestige based on his occupation. His part-time pension operation and small agricultural holdings provided additional income which, when combined with his other earnings, made him one of the more affluent members of the commune.

Their Roles with Regard to the Factions. The Social Christian Party also gave aspiring leaders a chance to become influential in commune affairs and in the process contribute to a redefining of the faction's boundaries. As it developed, the new party afforded opportunities for certain formerly politically frustrated individuals to obtain political office. In this sense, it formed a kind of social opportunity structure for newly emerging leaders, providing them with formal channels of influence in community affairs and, beyond that, with important links to the Cantonal government. In that this opportunity attracted incipient leaders, the boundaries of the two factions had to be redrawn.

It was a politically frustrated would-be leader who, with the help of his agnatic kin, forced the establishment of the Social Christian Party in Ausserberg in the first place. Clearly, one intended purpose of the formalization of the minority faction was to forge a route to commune leadership positions. Possibly another reason was to attract people to join the ranks of that faction.

The 1972 election of the grocery cooperative's director to the commune council demonstrates the value of the formalization of the factions in providing expanded avenues to political position for potential leaders and in attracting new associates. The fact that he changed party affiliation to the Social Christians in order to achieve his goal highlights the effectiveness of a second party in this regard. The party/faction in fact enhances its own viability by offering such opportunities to incipient leaders, even to the point of luring people from the opposition.

SUMMARY

The introduction of industry and commerce initiated social changes in Ausserberg which meaningfully altered life in the commune. Much of the old way of life was threatened by this economic transformation, yet the changes were for the most part, and within a short period of time, warmly embraced. Technological conveniences and social innovations, especially those which insured a secure supply of essential goods and services and the financial means to obtain them, found little opposition among people who had suffered through significant hardships in order to make only a meager living.

In the harsh habitat of the mountains of Valais, the men and women of Ausserberg had long faced strong competition- and faction-inducing pressures for survival. But the same factors which led to divisiveness also forced them to cooperate, and their ancient associations attest to their success in this regard. They formed utilitarian associations in order to adapt to the very practical needs of their agropastoral subsistence, and they formed non-utilitarian associations to symbolize and reinforce the unity they required.

When wage labor and commodity markets became accessible outside the commune, Ausserberg residents were eventually freed from the degree of social interdependence that had been enforced by the natural habitat. To some extent this new freedom from each other was recognized and acted upon. Ironically, however, the people of Ausserberg felt new pressures to cooperate. As a result, utilitarian associations were formed to carry on the valued aspects of the older lifestyle that had been provided by the self-sufficient household and agropastoralism. Other such associations operated to take advantage of the new cash economy, thus gaining even further benefits from a consumer-oriented society. At the same time, non-utilitarian associations enhanced the viability of the commune as a "community", while also protecting a proud people from the esteem eroding interactions they found at the workplace.

The new economy was not without its divisive consequences, however. Increased resources generated by wage labor and a cash economy also led to intensified competition for those resources. In these circumstances, people found reason to cooperate as part of a competitive struggle with other commune members. Factions now formalized, and associations became weapons in the battle. New leaders, deriving their support from the new sources of income, prestige, and resource control, led in the development of common interest associations, both in their cooperative and in their antagonistic aspects. These men, and in recent times women, became forces behind a realignment of the factions along new lines of power.

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