

Are Political Parties Dead?

Insight

The Daily Tar Heel

Early Times...

The value and effectiveness of political parties on the UNC campus has been a topic of debate for decades.

Considered as one of the oldest and strongest systems in the nation, the UNC political system has undergone vast changes in organization, ideals and appeal.

The campus itself has long held a reputation among southern colleges as being the most politically conscious student center.

The first political organizations to appear on campus were the literary societies. Student government was in the hands of these societies during the 1800's. Each student was required to join one of the two societies in existence. Expulsion from a society meant expulsion from the school. A revolt by students in 1904 induced the abandonment of the system.

The power formerly invested in the societies were given to a council composed of class presidents. The presidents were elected primarily on the basis of popularity.

Until 1921, the president of the senior class was chairman of the council, but in that year a student body president was elected for the first time.

Elections then began to take on a different perspective. Political organizations were beginning to be formed. In the 1922 elections a member of A.T.O. fraternity joined his forces with the student manager of Swain Hall and elected a majority of student officers through membership of the Di and Phi societies, the source of political power at the time.

The Kappa Sigs and Swain Hall got together in 1923 and elected Sam Cathey, who was later prosecuting attorney of Asheville. The election that year was so bitter and closely contested that the ballots had to be recounted twice.

In 1926 the successors of Cathey inaugurated a three-year regime which literally did away with all opposition. Of the 31 officers elected that year, 21 were uncontested and nine of the ten others went to the party.

The one all-powerful political party, which had dominated the political scene and served to stifle opposition, was

challenged for the first time in 1930. A group was organized that maintained that the non-fraternity element was insufficient and that the campus would benefit by having two parties. The challenge was futile as the old political machine elected 30 of the 31 officers.

The 1930 elections are remembered for other reasons as well. The editor race for the Yack was known as the "great massacre of 1930" and the editor race for the Carolina Magazine is remembered for its mudslinging and "yellow" handbills. The first paid publicity and giant torch-light parades were staged during the campaigns of 1931.

Sometime in the early part of 1931 a movement was started to create a large non-fraternity party. The fraternity politicians were aware of the implications of such a move and set about to create an All-Campus party, composed of both factions. Every office was captured by the party that year.

The All-Campus party succeeded in 1932 to put 26 of its members into office unopposed.

An unprecedented number of 1,966 students voted in the 1933 elections to terminate the unchallenged power of the All-Campus party and establish the University Party (UP).

In balloting characterized by split tickets and margins based on the popularity of the various candidates the two parties divided the offices elected.

The next year only ten UP candidates were opposed and none defeated. The campus political picture once again became a one-party affair.

The first signs of opposition to the UP were seen when the presidency of the rising junior and sophomore classes went to non-fraternity independent candidates. However, the UP managed to put 17 nominees into office unopposed during the campus nominations which lasted 15 minutes.

The beginnings of the Student Party (SP), which was instrumental in the election of the sophomore class president, were in 1936. The party was founded in the spring by Carl Fistel, Charles Robinson and Bil Col.

The SP gathered support rapidly and in 1937 swept nine candidates into office, including the president and vice president of the student body.

Signs of dissension began in 1937 within the ranks of the UP. An old party rule stating that no fraternity could have more than one major office threatened to split the party. Political maneuvering of nominations helped appease the fraternities in question and the split was averted.

For the third time in University history, two rival factions nominated candidates for a majority of campus offices in the 1938 elections.

That year a rejuvenated UP all but annihilated SP at the polls. Nineteen of the 30 offices were taken by the UP. The SP did capture the office of president and secretary-treasurer of the student body.

Such a comeback on the part of UP might be explained by the fact the steering committee was composed of 13 non-fraternity men and 12 fraternity men. Traditionally the political bandwagon for fraternities, the UP came out in demand for the election of only the best qualified men.

The office of secretary-treasurer was established in 1938 and a candidate was selected simultaneously by the student body.

By Lana Starnes and Mike Parnell

The elections of 1941 turned out well for the incumbent SP. Their candidates took the two top posts of student body president and vice president. That year also saw one of the most hotly contested races in years as Orville Campbell won by a narrow margin (three votes) over UP candidate Louis Harris to become editor of the Daily Tar Heel.

Amidst terrible mudslinging and name calling, the SP fell into a slump in the 1942 elections. The slump lasted throughout the war years.

"I ran for president of the student body opposed to the political party concept on campus. I felt the parties had stagnated themselves, student government and student interest. Since being elected, they have, if anything, become worse."

And so Student Body President Tommy Bello assessed the present condition of political parties on campus. Bello won the student presidency as an independent last spring. The last time an independent won the race was in 1955.

Three years ago more than a thousand persons came to the opening meetings of the two campus parties (University, or UP, and Student Party, or SP), but this year less than 20 persons attended the meetings.

"The parties have become worse because they have nothing to do," says Bello. "They are not providing a forum for the exchange of ideas. They are not bringing controversial ideas to the attention of the student populace. They are not training undergraduates in the ways of University politics. They are, in short, doing nothing."

University history points to some classic battles between the two parties and, on occasion, a third party making a dent in the foothold of the two powers. A third party was formed on campus last year, the Conservative Party (CP), and offered great hopes for the revival of the political party system.

Supporters of campus politics felt the new party could organize the conservative-minded persons on campus, admittedly a minority, and perhaps draw some moderates into their ranks. The SP and UP would split each other among the remaining moderates and the liberals on campus, it was felt, and perhaps provide a rebirth of the entire system.

The CP is fragmented and divided, however, and has not provided the new infusion of party blood needed to revive a rapidly-dying institution. The old parties are caught up in intra-party personal clashes and are defeating their own purposes of existence.

Whether or not, after Bello's victory, these parties can once again become powerful is a question of great importance to those interested in campus politics.

The answer, in Bello's eyes, is a most definite "no." "I feel parties to be a wave of the past, a wave of deadwood and frustrated politicians. I would hope that students would begin to run independently, to run as individuals and not as party labels," he said.

But a major question to be resolved is whether or not students are even interested in campus politics at all. With so many national issues pounding the minds of hapless students, some campus doings seem totally irrelevant. Student government in the past few years has been so listless as to support students' contention that the student mode of politics could be circumvented entirely in attempting to make corrections in campus conditions.

Bello's participation in the student strike last spring quieted those thoughts somewhat and his taking an active role in campus affairs this far this year has further strengthened the arguments of those who insist that student government is essential, even if political parties are not.

But Bello's active role in campus affairs, coupled with his victory as an independent candidate, makes the argument that much stronger that an independent can do the job better than a party man.

With no debts to pay to party cronies, the independent can employ the most qualified people, say party-downers, with no "spoils system," the whole idea of student government is improved.

But where will the future student presidents and campus leaders come from? Without party guide and direction, which allows a person to learn a great deal about campus politics in his freshman and sophomore years, what will happen to student government as it is known today?

The supporters of political parties offer the argument that a person can become much more experienced in the way to run a campus government by learning from others in a structures environment attuned to campus affairs, i.e. the political party.

This argument has merit and can easily be bandied about by the supporters and rejectors of political parties. However, the argument may be specious, indeed. The question is not what purpose do political parties serve; the question is: are they dead?

SP-UP-CP

SP activities were critically curtailed when dormitory organization was injured due to the coming of the V-12 and Pre-Flight programs. UP was not hurt by the war because of the retention of the fraternities which served as a base for organization. SP was faced with the impossible task of organizing the town vote.

Third parties, including the Carolina, United and United Carolina parties sprang up and quietly disappeared during the declining war years.

In 1944, the fraternities reached a peak by completely defeating the United Party, which was essentially the old SP. The election was also marked by the nomination of the first girl to the post of speaker of Student Legislature.

A slight comeback was staged by the United Party when nominees won positions as speaker of the Legislature and Yack editor.

April of 1946 saw the emergence of a new political party when approximately 150 students got together to form the new SP.

The old SP, organized in 1938, was supposedly in direct opposition to fraternities and sororities. The new SP, however, was opened to all individuals and opposed only to block memberships and voting.

Douglass Hunt, party organizer, said the aim of the new party was to convert what had for several years been government by and for a minority fraternity block into government by and for every student.

A controversy arose concerning the UP candidate who was also leading candidate for the SP nomination. As a result, the UP captured the vice presidency, editorship of the Daily Tar Heel and 11 seats in SL. The SP won positions of secretary-treasurer and filled 8 legislative seats.

An independent candidate, Dewey Dorsett, won the race for president of the student body.

The 1947 elections saw the emergence of another political party, the Campus Party (CP).

The party was made up largely of dissatisfied SP members who walked out on a SP meeting when the SP refused to oust a certain party member.

The CP platform was almost a duplicate of the SP platform. Among the ten objectives of the party were the establishment of a student bank, housing improvements and installation of a stoplight at Cameron and Raleigh streets.

The SP, despite the party split, captured all the major offices except the vice presidency. The UP defeat was blamed on mudslinging and name calling on their part.

The trend was reversed in 1952 when the UP swept all major offices and the Legislature. Ham Horton was elected the first UP president since 1945.

The 1945 race for editor of the Daily Tar Heel, put an independent candidate into office for the third consecutive time.

UP candidate Bob Gorham was elected student president in 1953 by a margin of seven votes. The UP also took all senior class offices and 13 legislative seats. The SP won the race for vice president and likewise captured 13 legislative seats.

The SP was hurt in the '53 election due to its pledge to abolish fees to the Athletic Association.

Don Fowler, defeated in attempts for the SP nomination for president in 1955, ran as an independent. SP floorleader David Reid resigned his post to support Fowler. Charles Ackerman, UP publicity chairman and Lionel King, UP nominee for legislative seat and member of the UP steering committee resigned from UP to also support Fowler.

Fowler captured the office and the SP and UP virtually divided the other offices.

Crossing of party lines took place again in 1956 when the SP floorleader resigned his post to support the UP candidate for president.

The SP, after being accused of dirty politics by the UP, captured the major offices and won control of the Legislature.

Nine candidates were disqualified from running in the 1958 election because they did not meet with requirements of the election laws.

That year the SP took the offices of president, vice president and secretary. The UP took all the senior class offices, head cheerleader and treasurer.

Led To Rise In The 60's And Then...Decline

The 1960's started uneventfully as the UP captured all the major offices in 1960. A complete reversal was made the following year as SP made a complete sweep of offices. For the first time in several years SP had a majority of seats in the legislature.

UP won positions for president, vice secretary and treasurer in the 1962 elections while SP made a clean sweep of the senior class offices.

An independent threw the vice presidential race into a run-off. The outcome put SP candidate Mike Lawler into office as leader of a predominately UP legislature.

A write-in candidate in '62 for editor of the Daily Tar Heel took more votes than the candidates on the ballot.

Division within the parties

characterized the elections of 1963. The UP was split into old Greeks, who favored continued absolute fraternity domination and the new Greeks, who favored winning and wanted to include dormitory men.

The SP was divided into two factions in 1963, the "traditionalists" and the "know-nothings." The "traditionalists" believed in an expanded stronger student government and student government interested in all segments of campus. The "know-nothings" felt SG was too ignorant and incompetent to act in any manner at any time and felt it safer to do nothing.

As a result of party division the offices were split with a SP president, a UP vice president and a SP majority of one in the Legislature.

A resolution which would have submitted the issue of a student boycott

to the campus in a referendum was the focus point of the 1964 election. The resolution was proposed by a UP legislator and was defeated by the SP in a 14 to 12 vote.

Many students felt that what could have been an important and meaningful expression of opinion by the student body was treated by both parties as just another item of party politics.

The elections, however, brought little enthusiasm and energy was drained from the campaigns by poor weather, spring vacation and the Carolina Symposium. The UP scored big in three of the four major races while SP gained control of the legislature and virtually all the important committee chairmanships.

The major offices were split between the two parties in the 1965 elections. Paul Dickinson, SP candidate, won the

presidency after losing the year before. Control of the legislature was retained by the SP.

The campaigns of 1966 were rather dull and unobtrusive. It was a year of close, non-controversial candidates. However, there was a presidential runoff, the first since 1958. The SP continued to control the legislature but only by a margin of two.

The '66 election was distinguished as having the largest percentage party membership for women in the history of student government. The SP found its convention controlled by campus women with coeds running for nearly every class office.

The 1967 elections saw the SP make a clean sweep of the offices putting Bob Travis in as president of the student body.

Things were reversed in the 1968 elections as the UP captured the offices of president, vice president and secretary of the student body.

A strong show by the independent candidate threw the presidential race into a runoff resulting in the election of UP candidate Ken Day.

There were plenty of issues that year. The UP called for the abolition of the campus code while SP called for limitations of the code to either Chapel Hill or campus. Both parties called for changes in the judicial system and reform of women's rules.

In 1969, Alan Albright won the election for student president on the SP ticket.

Last year, for the first time since 1955, an independent won the election as

president of the student body. Tommy Bello won a majority of the votes on the first ballot over the UP, SP, CP (Conservative Party) and two independent candidates. His election sparked discussion that the major political parties on campus are dead.

The political parties still exist, however, and campus politicians point with pride to the distinguished men in the state and country who got their start on campus through the political parties.

But three years ago, more than 1,500 students attended the first meeting of the SP. This fall, the first meeting drew a crowd of about 20 persons.

The SP and UP are still alive and have been joined by the CP, conservative party, but the days of campus parties dominating student elections appear to be gone.