"WHY JUST GO FOR 51%?"
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE IN
THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

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There is no way to peace; peace is the way.
--A. J. Muste

Introduction

This work is motivated by the ongoing debate about democracy and organization. Historically, this debate has been centered around determining to what degree and under what conditions democracy may be possible in large-scale organizations. One cannot get very far in answering this question without encountering the so-called "iron law of oligarchy." In *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, Robert Michels, himself a dedicated socialist, declared that democracy and socialism were both structurally impossible. He argued that the very principle of organization makes oligarchy (rule by the minority) the inevitable result of any organized collective endeavor. Studies attempting to challenge or verify this claim have generally maintained that organization and democracy are indeed inversely related--that the "more organized" a group becomes, the less likely it is to be democratic and the more likely it is to generate a ruling minority, or oligarchy.[1]

Most of these studies, however, have treated organization and bureaucracy as synonymous. Both Weber (1968) and Michels (1962) argued that in modern society the rational-bureaucratic form of organization--a rationalized system of procedural formality, jurisdictional specialization, and hierarchical authority--is the inevitable result of an advanced division of labor.[2] While this is certainly true for most modern organizations, not all groups are bureaucratic. There have always been other organizational forms, even in industrialized societies. In fact, there is some indication

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[1] Studies upholding the iron law have usually focused on the phenomenon of goal displacement, the leadership's tendency to set goals for the organization which become more conservative over time, despite the membership's wishes. For example, Selznick (1949) found that an organization's goals may become more conservative as a result of the leadership trying to co-opt external oppositional elites, while Sills (1957) argued that leaders create new goals in order to maintain the organization itself, once its original goals have been attained. See also Gusfield (1955) and Merton (1957).

[2] Definition condensed from Weber's "Bureaucracy" in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Gerth and Mills, eds. New York: Oxford University Press. 1958.

that in the age of computer and information technology, the range of extant organizational forms is expanding.[3]

If "organized" doesn't mean bureaucratic, then what does it mean to say a group is organized? For the purposes of this paper, let us consider that a group is organized if its corporate activities adhere to an identifiable, non-random (but not necessarily unchanging) pattern, such that some set of underlying principles can be discerned to explain its structure and operations. Such a pattern and its accompanying principles together make up the organizational structure, or organizational form, of any such group. Bureaucracy, by this definition, is just one *kind* of pattern based on a particular set of operating principles (e.g. formality, rationalization, hierarchy).

In the absence of any clear distinction between organization and bureaucracy, there has been a tendency in the literature to regard non-bureaucratic groups as *dis*-organized rather than *differently* organized, thus defining out of existence precisely those groups that could potentially serve as counter-examples to the iron law--those who intentionally adopt alternative structures in order to *avoid* the centralization of power and the development of oligarchic control.[4] Where empirical research has used bureaucracy as a kind of litmus indicator of organization, the findings can only be said to suggest a relationship between *bureaucracy* and oligarchy; they say nothing about the relationship between organization *per se* and oligarchy.

This study will reconsider the relationship between organization and democracy in light of the existence of non-bureaucratic organizational forms. Instead of asking if *being* organized (in any form) automatically leads to oligarchy, this study asks how the *way* a group is organized (its organizational structure) might affect its ability to operate democratically. Our substantive focus will be the Religious Society of Friends (also known as Quakers), an international organization which as a whole and in its constituent parts utilizes a decentralized, non-bureaucratic structure

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[3] In "The Collectivist Organization: An Alternative to Rational-Bureaucratic Models," Rothschild-Whitt (1979) developed ideal-type descriptions of both the rational-bureaucratic organization and the collectivist-democratic alternative, constrasting the two models along eight different dimensions, and suggesting that these two ideal types are two ends of a continuum of intervening types which future research needs to flesh out.

and has governed itself according to principles of direct, participatory democracy for over 300 years. The Friends seem to represent a deviant case in the Iron Law debate, not only because, as a large-scale organization in modern society, they have maintained a non-bureaucratic form, but also, at least in the case studied here, because they seem to have resisted the supposedly inevitable development of oligarchy. Although we sacrifice variation in the dependent variable by looking only at a single case, the implicit comparison with past studies of bureaucratic organizations should highlight the importance of organizational structure, as it is one of the more salient characteristic differences between this case and those in earlier studies.

From 1981 to 1992, University Friends Meeting (UFM) in Seattle, Washington struggled with a particularly difficult policy decision about how the Meeting would deal with gay and lesbian marriages. I will start by describing the organizational structure and decision-making process of the Meeting, which closely resembles what Rothschild-Whitt (1979) described as the *collectivist-democratic* form of organization. Following this description, I will tell the story of the Meeting's struggle with the gay and lesbian marriage issue and argue that on the basis of a set of proposed indicators, the UFM was virtually free of oligarchic control during this struggle. The logic here is that if a minority were calling the shots in this organization, it would be likely to use its power during just this kind of decision--one where traditional values and beliefs are being challenged. Likewise, if an oligarchy did not emerge during this time of internal stress, one would surmise that something about the organization was resistant to it.

Rather than asking what conditions might have given rise to this collectivist-democratic form--a question which is beyond the scope of this investigation--I will discuss some factors which I think enable UFM to *sustain* its practice of participatory democracy. How can such an organization survive and function effectively in modern society? What allows it to resist the tendencies to which virtually all other organizations succumb? By framing the question in this way, we should be better able to outline some of the social costs, benefits, and trade-offs involved when an organization chooses the collectivist-democratic rather than the rational-bureaucratic form of organization. Hopefully, this analysis will suggest something about the limits of this form's applicability (as well as the relevance of Michels' Iron Law thesis) in other types of organizations. I will conclude with a brief discussion of some of the implications of this case for democratic theory more broadly.

The Problem in Relation to Prior Research

For the sake of theoretical context, let us take a closer look at Michels' argument. Breaking the 'iron law" argument down into its essential deductive steps, we can see that Michels was making three progressive propositions (the first derived from a given premise, the second and third conditional upon the first):

1) *Bureaucracy happens.* Large-scale organizations in modern society will always be organized in rational-bureaucratic form, based on the premise that there is an ever-increasing need for technical efficiency in the pursuit of collective goals, which in turn necessarily leads to a complex and hierarchical division of labor;

2) *If bureaucracy happens, power rises.* Rational-bureaucracies automatically concentrate power in the hands of a professional leadership, confering upon them a monopoly of skills, knowledge, and resources; and

3) *If power rises, power corrupts.* Once power is concentrated, the leadership will always act to preserve its power--even when that means going against the interests of its constituents--and will use undemocratic means to stifle any internal opposition which it interprets as a threat to its authority.

Many studies have tried to either explain oligarchy or prove that democracy exists in various kinds of organizational settings. Whether their subjects have been trade unions, nation-states, social movement groups, or business corporations, all of these studies have challenged, at least implicitly, one of these three steps in Michels' argument. That is, students of the iron law debate can be divided into three categories: (step 3) those who question whether powerful leaders necessarily act to preserve their power (i.e. they are nonrepresentative and unaccountable); (step 2) those who question whether or not bureaucratic organization necessarily concentrates power in the hands of an elite; and (step 1) those who question whether or not bureaucracy is the only viable organizational form in modern society.

For example, those who take a pluralist approach to questions of political authority, focus on step three. Pluralists agree that bureaucracy is a given in modern society, and that bureaucracy tends to centralize power, but they argue that leaders can be held *accountable* to the needs of their constituents so long as there are democratic elections, multiple avenues for rank and file

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participation, and competition for leadership positions.[5] In this vein, Lipset, Trow, and Coleman (1956) argue in *Union Democracy* that a two-party electoral system is a necessary and sufficient indicator of democracy in any organization (and therefore a sufficient safeguard against oligarchy). Two-party systems (and hence, democracy) were said to be more likely in smaller organizations, in groups where the membership is less stratified, and where members can express their interests through loyalty to autonomous interest groups within the larger organization. While this study will not directly address the question of responsiveness, I hope to show that the two-party system is not the only way to conceptualize a working democracy; that dissent can be institutionalized in at least one other structural form.

Whether or not step 2 holds true depends on how one defines oligarchy, which in turn depends on one's definition of power. The dictionary tells us that oligarchy means rule by the minority while democracy means rule by the majority. But how do we operationalize these definitions in our analysis of actually existing organizations? Michels himself was inconsistent about what he thought constituted oligarchic control. In places he argued that a one-party political apparatus that keeps getting re-elected is an oligarchy, implying that a two-party system where incumbents are occasionally replaced would guarantee democracy. In other places he argues, with Rousseau and Bakunin, that *any* delegation of authority is undemocratic in that it impinges on individual sovereignty and that representative democracies are all really oligarchical underneath.

Another definitional stumbling block is the concept of *ruling*. How do we know who is really ruling? If oligarchy means rule of the minority over the majority, then decision-making by

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[5] Cf Lipset, Trow, and Coleman (1956); Edelstein (1967); Gouldner (1955); Lipset (1962); Schumpeter (1950) in support of the pluralist thesis of accountability. On the other side, Piven & Cloward (1977) also focus on the accountability question (my step three), but come out on Michels' side of the argument. The step three debate tends to be cast in terms of two related indications of oligarchy: either it is framed as a question of whether or not the original goals of the organization are displaced by the leadership, or as a question of whether or not the substance of those goals becomes more politically conservative. While the point is tangential to our current purposes, I believe that the latter framing is a misinterpretation of Michels, whom I believe used the word "conservative" in its original sense--as in to conserve, not in the sense of acting to support the status quo. Michels argued that the leadership begins acting to *conserve* its power. Such "conservative tendencies" could theoretically become manifest in either a reactionary or radical direction, so long as the leaders are not acting in accordance with the wishes of the members.

majority rule could be taken to indicate an absence of oligarchy, and *any* organization that operates by consensus--even if a minority might exercise some degree of *informal* influence-- should be considered *super*-democratic by definition. But is it really just the formal decision-making procedure that determines who rules? If we find that the exertion of informal influence in fact represents a concentration of real *power* within the organization, then it probably doesn't matter what formal procedure for decision-making is in effect, because that minority will consistently be able to manipulate the procedure to their benefit. To the extent that power may be based in something *other* than political authority, there could be, as Domhoff (   ) contends, a ruling elite that has a significant amount of *un*official power. Where a system is being manipulated to serve the needs of the powerful--whether they hold official leadership positions or not--we would probably not call it a democratic system, regardless of its structure.

This is the basis of the orthodox Marxist critique of Michels, which focuses on step two of his argument. While agreeing with the assumption that organization means bureacracy and that when power is centralized the leadership will act to preserve its power, Marx and later Marxists such as Hook and Bukharin disagreed that bureaucracy necessarily leads to a concentration of power.[6] Marx insisted that power is not based in the technical form of organization, but only in the ownership of property. Thus, he did not acknowledge what Bakunin and later Dahrendorf ( ) argued: that the vested authority to *control* property could be a somewhat independent source of power and that a socialist ruling class could be just as brutal and unjust as a capitalist one. For Marx, political authority in the hands of worker-bureaucrats in a socialist society would not constitute power *per se,* because without owning the means of production, they would supposedly have no material interest in maintaining their positions.[7] While I will not directly

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[6] Lipset makes this point in his introduction to Michels, but it is also apparent in Marx's debates with Bakunin during the last few years of the First International. See Kenafick (1948) and Morris (1993) for comprehensive, balanced accounts of the Marx/Bakunin debates, especially in terms of their disagreement about political vs. economic power, the internal organization of the First International, and how much authority the General Council (the ruling body of the International), should have.

[7] Another area of scholarship which has focused on the ownership of material resources as the primary source of power is social movement theory, especially the American Resource Mobilization and Political Process models (McAdam, 1982; Kitschelt, 1986; Klandermans and Tarrow, 1988; Klandersmans, 1984; Tarrow, 1991; Tilly, 1984; McCarthy & Zald, 1973). Scholars in these fields have not usually analyzed the distribution of power *within* the organizations they study or their organizational structures (Zald & Ash, 19___ being a rare exception).

address this question here, it seems clear that both kinds of power exist and are somewhat independent, though frequently overlapping. For that reason, in looking for oligarchy among the Quakers, I will look for *any* systematic concentration of power, as evidenced by the *outcome* of the decision-making process. That is, if the leadership structure consistently produces outcomes that the needs of a minority while systematically neglecting those of the majority, then it would seem that a concentration of governing power exists, either in the hands of the official decision-makers or in the hands of some other group which is effectively controlling their decisions. For the purposes of this study, then, oligarchy will be defined as *a concentration of governing power in the hands of a minority, such that* de facto, *whatever this minority wants is what comes to pass in the organization, even when this desire goes against the wishes of the majority.*

The third camp, which includes collectivist anarchists and a small group of New Social Movement theorists, would challenge Michels at step one of his argument. That is, they would agree that rational-bureaucracy leads to a concentration of power and that once power is concentrated in the hands of a minority, that minority will act to preserve its power, but they would argue that rational-bureaucracy is not the only way collective behavior can effectively be organized. Collectivist anarchists have long argued that it is possible to maintain a system of direct democracy in the form of a decentralized, federated network of autonomous units, in which all binding decisions are made by consensus at the lowest level of organization.[8]

In the last three decades, especially in Western Europe, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of social movement groups organized in just such a manner, who have attempted to use this collectivist structure (or something very similar) as a strategy for social activism. In Europe, this structure has been characteristic of so-called New Social Movements (NSMs) (Klandermans, 1986; Rucht, 1990; Gundelach, 1989, Cohen, 1985). The organizational structures

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Instead, they have tended to focus on the external environment of social movement organizations (SMOs) and their competition with other groups for access to resources, rather than on internal democracy. For the most part, bureaucracy has been seen as an integral feature of organization and an asset to be cultivated in social movement groups due to its greater efficiency.

[8] In a slightly less developed form, this federalist structure was promoted by Bakunin in the late 1860s. See Morris (1993) for a comprehensive discussion of Bakunin's political theory, and Bakunin's *Marxism, Freedom and the State,* translated and edited by K.J. Kenafick, 1950 for the original essays.

of NSMs, however, have received surprisingly little attention from social movement scholars, who have been more interested in other aspects of their "newness," such as why they were predominantly mobilizing around non-class related issues and identities. A few theorists have acknowledged, often only in passing, that movement groups choose this organizational structure because of their ideological commitment to direct democracy, but to my knowledge, only Rothschild-Whitt explicitly analyzes the relationship between this structure and the level of democracy actually achieved within the organization.[9]

While this study touches on all of the questions related to organization and oligarchy, it will be theoretically focused on step one of Michels' argument. Like Rothschild-Whitt, I am asking the question of how organizational structure affects the likelihood of democracy within the organization. Where she looks at retail and service-sector collectives of 10-20 members, however, University Friends Meeting, the subject of this study, has a membership of approximately 200. This will allow us to examine how size affects the viability of the collectivist structure, and also whether or not the conditions Rothschild-Whitt found to be conducive to its maintenance apply in a non-production oriented organizational setting.

The Collectivist-Democracy, Quaker Style

National Structure of the Religious Society of Friends (US)

In its general framework, the Quaker structure has remained virtually unchanged since it was first established by George Fox in the 1650s and '60s. The Society is organized into three basic tiers: local Monthly Meetings, sub-regional Quarterly Meetings, and regional Yearly Meetings. Yearly Meetings may choose to remain independent or they may affiliate with one of four different national Friends' federations: Friends United Meeting, Friends General Conference,

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[9] For example, in the United States, Barbara Epstein (1991) notes that what she calls the Non-violent Direct Action Movement is characterized by a commitment to this kind of direct democratic structure, Gerlach and Hine (1970) found a similar organizational structure among the Black Power and Pentacostal movements of the 1950s and '60s, and Joyce Rothschild-Whitt (1976, 1979) found a sophisticated political analysis at the heart of the explosion of alternative "collectives" in the 1970s. In Europe, Rucht (1990) and Gundelach (1989) are the only scholars I have found who have paid much attention to the internal structures of movements and their ideological justifications.

Evangelical Friends Alliance, or the Conservative Friends. These larger federations may meet in conference occasionally, but their significance is primarily symbolic.

The fundamental executive unit in the Society of Friends is the Monthly Meeting, so called because, in addition to weekly Meetings for Worship, its members gather once each month to conduct business--to make collective decisions regarding the corporate life of the group. A number of Monthly Meetings together form a Quarterly Meeting, and several Quarterly Meetings together form a Yearly Meeting. Despite other differences among Friends in terms of their style of worship or the specifics of their Monthly Meetings' organizational structures, the basic relationship between Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly Meetings is and has been consistent, both across branches and across time.[10]

While this consistency is remarkable in itself, the Quaker system is also unusually elastic. For example, the American Friends have developed a somewhat different structure than the British. Within the U.S., moreover, there are fairly substantial differences between the five national coalitions of Friends--especially between "programmed" and "unprogrammed" Friends-- as a result of the several "separations" which occurred in the 19th century. There are also variations, although more slight, from one Monthly Meeting to the next within the same Yearly Meeting. While a number of historical factors have shaped this development, one of the more important reasons that Quakers have tolerated such differences within their ranks is that the guidelines they follow in organizing their corporate life are elastic *by design*. Quakers have always resisted hard and fast rules or creeds of any kind. God's will is not thought to be static--revealed once to prophets or religious leaders then laid down for all time as a set of formal laws to be rigidly followed. Rather, Quakers see God's will as constant only in its overarching principles. When interpreting those principles as they apply to specific problems, the "leading of the Spirit" is

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[10] There were several large and painful internal disputes in the 19th century in the U.S. which resulted in the division of the Society into what are now five different branches. Some of these "Great Separations" seem to have represented conflicts between the personalities of thd charismatic leaders of each faction more than irreconcilable theological disputes. Recent work to bring unity and healing between branches (which, nevertheless have remained affiliated with the broader Society of Friends) seems to be paying off, as two branches have rejoined. See Howard Brinton's *Friends for 300 Years* for a history of the schisms, and Francis B. Hall's *Friends in the Americas*, for information on the cuprently existing branches in the U.S. and elsewhere in North and South America.

believed to be continually and directly revealed through the practice of collective worship. This concept of continual revelation is an ideological cornerstone of Quaker practice. Each Yearly Meeting publishes a Book of Discipline, now usually called the *Faith and Practice* which serves as a guide to the healthy operation of Monthly Meetings and as a list of "advices" regarding worship and the conduct of business. As with most such Quaker documents, the *Faith and Practice* usually begins with the following quote from a collection of advices drafted in 1656:

> 'Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with the measure of light which is pure and holy, may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life."[11]

The relationship between the Monthly and Yearly Meetings is also informed by this tendency toward localism, the belief that God's will is revealed directly to the common believer through the corporate experience of worship. The Monthly Meeting, a community that worships together and is thereby considered best able to discern God's will, is the autonomous unit of sovereignty in the Society of Friends. A Yearly Meeting has no binding authority over its constituent Monthly and Quarterly Meetings, except in two very specific instances: 1) Monthly and Quarterly Meetings may be "set up or laid down only by the authority of the Yearly Meeting," and 2) "any individuals disciplined in a lower meeting may appeal for further consideration of their case to a higher meeting."[12] As noted by Howard Brinton, all other decisions undertaken by the Quarterly and Yearly Meetings have advisory authority only:

> "The larger bodies, such as quarterly and yearly meetings, do not exist to exert authority over the monthly meetings but rather to undertake such matters as cannot so well be undertaken by the smaller bodies. They serve to overcome the isolation of the smaller groups by linking them to a larger whole with its correspondingly greater breadth and variety of view, its more inclusive range of acquaintanceship, and its greater power to carry out certain concerns."[13]

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[11] *Faith and Practice,* North Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, Second Edition, 1993, p.2.

[12] Howard Brinton, 1955. *Guide to Quaker Practice* , Pendle Hill Pamphlet 20, p.36.

[13] Ibid. p.35.

In other words, these larger bodies don't govern; they function as occasions where differences of opinion may be aired and resolved, where problems emerging in various communities may be discussed and suggestions for solutions exchanged, and where common goals and commitments may be developed. In order to foster this kind of active interaction, the Monthly Meetings make annual reports to the Quarterly and Yearly Meetings, and Yearly Meetings issue "queries," "advices," and reports of their proceedings to Monthly Meetings. Quarterly and Yearly Meetings are also financially dependent on the Monthly Meetings, who contribute the monies to sustain their operations.

The Role of Monthly Meetings

According to the North Pacific Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice*, the Monthly Meeting is a community which facilitates "order, unity, and power" among Friends:

> "Through the corporate life of a Monthly Meeting, Friends order their lives in relation to God and, through that relationship, to the most profound realities of life: birth and death, marriage and family, community of spirit, and concern for humanity and all of God's creation."[14]

The two main functions of the Monthly Meeting are "providing for the care and nourishment of the 'People of God,' and also for the fulfillment of God's will in the world at large."[15] Put another way, the Meeting is meant to serve as a kind of extended family or empowering community for its members. As such, it undertakes the following responsibilities and decisions:

> "It receives and records new members; terminates membership when necessary; provides spiritual and, if need be, material aid to those in its fellowship; counsels with members in troubled circumstances; oversees marriages; gives care at the time of death; collects and dispenses funds for its maintenance and work; witnesses to Friends' testimonies; relates itself to its Quarterly and Yearly Meeting, to other bodies of Friends and to other organizations with common concerns; and carries on any work or

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[14] NPYM's *Faith and Practice*, p.69.

[15] Ibid, p.70.

assumes any function consistent with the faith of Friends and not specifically referred to some other Friends body."[16]

These tasks make up the business of the Meeting, which is primarily carried out in committees and in the monthly Meeting for Business, also called 'Meeting for Worship for the Conduct of Business." Spiritual fellowship, as part of the 'the care and nourishment of the 'People of God,'" takes place at Meeting for Worship. At UFM Meeting for Worship is held at 9:30am and 11:00am each First Day (Sunday), and Meeting for Business is usually held the first Sunday of the month in the late afternoon. These times are announced in the weekly Bulletin (distributed at each Meeting for Worship) and in UFM's monthly newsletter, *Gleamings*. Meetings for Business are open to all members and attenders, and any interested party may bring 'concerns" (new business) before the Meeting. Under special circumstances there may also be special "called" meetings for the conduct of unfinished or urgent business.

Each Monthly Meeting determines for itself (with guidance and advice from the broader Friends community) how it shall be structured, what committees and officers it needs to establish, what staff it may want to hire, etc. Meetings are cautioned in the *Faith and Practice* to keep the degree of organization to a minimum, that organization 'does not exist for its own sake but to provide what is needed for the Meeting's orderly and effective operation, while allowing each person a maximum of freedom, participation and responsibility."[17] Similarly, Brinton cautions Meetings to keep the number of committees to a minimum, 'so that the meeting as a whole can feel under the weight of all important matters. Specialization of function," he notes, 'if taken too far, will destroy organic unity."[18]

Background on University Friends Meeting

In creating an organizational form which will suit its particular needs, each Meeting seeks a balance between following tradition and following its own collective 'leadings." The following is a brief introduction to the University Friends Meeting (UFM) in Seattle, including its

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[16] Ibid, p.74.

[17] NPYM *Faith and Practice*, p.74.

[18] Brinton, op. cit., p.45.

organizational structure and decision-making process.[19] My information on UFM came from four sources: 1) my personal observation while an attender at UFM from September, 1994 to September, 1995; 2) semi-structured, narrative interviews with the Office Coordinator and 15 other members and attenders of UFM, several of whom have served as Clerks either of the Meeting or of various committees; 3) documents, files, and minutes from the archives at UFM as well as some donated from the personal files of my interview subjects, and 4) the *Faith and Practice* of the North Pacific Yearly Meeting, of which UFM is a member.

UFM is a large community, as Quaker Meetings go. Its membership has hovered around 200 since the early 1980s. It is located in the University District of Seattle, Washington, a densely populated urban area just a few blocks from the University of Washington campus. Consequently UFM has, in addition to its permanent membership, a fairly large number of curiosity-driven one-time attenders and a substantial population of students who get involved for a few years until they graduate and move on. Demographically, UFM Friends are predominantly from European-American backgrounds (with a small number of Asian-Americans and African-Americans), mostly (but not exclusively) middle- or upper-middle class, well educated, and politically progressive. Perhaps also because of the University setting, there are a large number of professionals and more young people than in many Quaker Meetings. But there is also a vital multi-generational community at UFM, although adolescents seem underrepresented. The First-Day School serves dozens of pre-teenaged children each week, there are often infants and new-borns present at Meeting for Worship, and elders are an active and respected part of the community. The oldest active member, an honored peace activist who spearheaded the first civilian relief mission to Hiroshima at the end of World War II, is now 101 years old and still regularly attends worship and Meetings for Business.

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[19] One thing to note is that while there is considerable variation in the specifics of organizational structure from one Meeting to the next, the decision-making process seems to be much more uniform in its particulars. Perhaps this is because the decisionmaking process is so firmly based on the experience of Quaker worship, which Michael Sheeran, in *Beyond Majority Rule,* calls the only real Quaker sacrement.

Committees and Officers

UFM has twenty standing committees, and ad hoc committees are set up as needed to handle special projects or issues as they come up. The Meeting also appoints four officer positions (clerk, recording clerk, statistical clerk, and treasurer) and at least eight reprentatives who serve as liaisons to other organizational bodies, such as the Quarterly and Yearly Meetings, the Seattle Area Church Council, and the American Friends Service Committee. Each committee also has a clerk or sometimes two co-clerks. The clerk's role (described below) is the same for a committee as it is for the Meeting as a whole. In fact, committees are supposed to operate according to the same process as the Meeting for Business. Organizationally, they are a sort of microcosm of the whole Meeting, just as the Quarterly and Yearly Meetings mirror the Monthly Meeting on a larger scale. The same standard of the "good order of Friends" applies to all Friends' gatherings.

All members of committees, officers, and representatives are recruited and nominated by the Nominating Committee, which submits its recommendations for the full slate of positions to the Meeting for Business in April of each year. This is no mean task, given that there are upwards of 120 different positions to keep filled. Most positions serve staggered two-year terms, running from June 1 through May 31, with the exceptions of Worship & Ministry and Oversight Committees whose members serve three-year terms. The Nominating Committee is nominated by the Committee to Nominate the Nominating Committee (the "comnom-nomcom"), which itself is nominated by the Clerk every two years and approved by the Meeting. The Nominating Committee basically acts like an organizing body (in the activist sense): it recruits and motivates people to serve the Meeting in a whatever capacity best suits their interests and abilities. The slate of nominations from the Nominating Committee is then discussed and approved, sometimes with amendments, at Meeting for Business. The table on the following pages summarizes the functions of the various standing committees at UFM.

Service on committees and attendance at committee meetings are open to everyone, with the exception of the Nominating, Oversight, and Worship and Ministry Committees. To serve on these committees one must be a member of the Religious Society of Friends, and primarily for reasons of confidentiality and privacy, the meetings of these committees are closed except by invitation. Moreover, the work done by these committees probably has the most impact on the life

of the community. For that reason, we will look carefully at these committees when we analyze whether or not an oligarchy might exist at UFM.

Authority of the Committees

All work done by the Meeting is carried out either in committees or by the Meeting as a whole during the monthly Meetings for Business. *Faith and Practice* contains no specific guidelines for determining which decisions must be brought before the Meeting and which can be made in committees. Nor did UFM have any formal protocol concerning the division of decisionmaking authority between the committees and the Meeting. My informants told me simply that all important decisions are to be brought before the Meeting, though committees often make recommendations. In smaller Meetings, the Clerk of the Meeting would have responsibility for making this determination, because s/he would set the agenda for the monthly meetings.

Because of its size and the sheer volume of activity, however, UFM established a Coordinating Committee, made up of the clerks of all of the standing committees, which meets *with* the Clerk to set the agenda for the monthly meeting. In doing so, this group determines which issues and decisions must be brought before the Meeting, which will be postponed, and which may be settled by the committees themselves. Coordinating Committee meetings are open to all. Anyone with a concern to bring before the Meeting is encouraged to approach someone on the Coordinating Committee first or come to a Coordinating Committee meeting, so that it gets onto the agenda. Alternatively, anyone may bring a concern directly to the Meeting if they so choose.

From what I could learn, decisions which must always be brought before the Meeting include the following: all general policy decisions; decisions regarding anything where the will of the Meeting is being represented publicly (such as requests for sponsorships or endorsements); annual budget and funding decisions; decisions regarding the hiring and firing of personnel; and the appointment of officers, representatives, and committee members. Committees serve to collect and assess information, make recommendations to the Meeting, and implement the will of the Meeting once a decision has been made, within the parameters set by that decision.

Role of the Clerk

The position of the Clerk is the most crucial of UFM's four officer positions to an understanding of Quaker self-governance. The Treasurer does what treasurers usually do in an organization: monitors the budget and manages the finances of the Meeting, with the help of the Finance Committee. There are three basic functions of the Clerk's job: record keeping, reporting, and facilitating. Smaller Meetings often have one person responsible for all three of these functions, but because UFM is such a large and active meeting, it has split them into three separate positions in order to keep the load manageable for each. The reporting function is given to the Statistical Clerk, who keeps track of membership and other pertinent statistics and files an annual report to the Quarterly and Yearly Meetings. The Recording Clerk keeps the minutes of the Meetings for Business and otherwise assists and/or stands in for the Clerk as needed. The last function, facilitating, is what UFM simply calls 'the Clerk"--a role in the Meeting which is a deceptively difficult and complex position both to perform and to analyze.

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF UFM COMMITTEE FUNCTIONS

Committee	Function
Arts	Arranges periodic shows in Meetinghouse and fosters the creative spirit in UFM
Care	Oversees care committees formed to assist members of Meeting[20]
Childcare Coordinators	Arrange for care of children during meeting functions
Education	Designs the program of education and activities for the children and young people of the Meeting. Finds staff to carry out the program.
Finance	Manages finances of the Meeting, formulates annual budget, and sees that Meeting keeps within its means.
Friends Center	Develops opportunities for new and long-standing members of the Meeting to get to know one another better and to build a strong sense of community. Has responsibility for a variety of special Meeting events.
Gleamings Oversight	Advises the editor of *Gleamings*, the monthly newsletter of UFM.
Hospitality	Oversees First Day social hours and provides hospitality for special occasions.
Junior Friends Advisors	Work with older children/teenagers of Meeting to design programs and activities.
Library	Serves as collective "librarian" of the UFM library, with responsibility for buying and keeping track of books and other publications for reference and circulation.
Nominating	Ascertains interests of Meeting members and attenders and consults with officers and committee clerks to recommend people to fill UFM positions.

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[20] Care committees are formed when a member of rattender of Meeting is seriously ill or incapacitated or recovering from some kind of traumatic event. The committee sets up a visitation schedule and/or sees to whatever needs the person may have to ease their way through the difficult time. Elders and terminally ill Friends are cared for as needed until their passing.

Committee	Function
Oversight	Oversees marriages, memorials, memberships, and records, and looks after some physical needs of individuals; recommends individuals to serve on clearness committees[21]
Peace and Social Concerns	Meets monthly to focus on a few concerns of importance in the local and larger communities. Sponsors workshops and responds directly or brings recommendations to Monthly Meeting.
Personnel	Works with appropriate committees to hire Meeting employees and oversees the relationship between the Meeting and its employees.
Quaker House	Oversees management of Quaker House, its renovation projects, grounds development and maintenance, and apartment rental.
QUEST	Oversees the QUEST (Quaker Experiential Service Training) program including finances, securing agencies, and selecting interns.[22]
Scholarship	Works with University of Washington Finance Office to select scholarship recipients.
Upkeep	Maintains buildings and grounds. Serves as chief liaison with caretaker and janitor.
Worship and Ministry	Fosters and strengthens the spiritual life of the Meeting by nurturing the Meeting for Worship and the spiritual growth of individuals in the Meeting.
Worship Group Oversight	Representatives from Worship Groups and UFM meet to support and nourish those Worship Groups under the care of the Meeting.[23]

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[21] Any member or regular attender who is facing a particular difficult decision or transition in their lives (e.g. divorce, marriage, career change, decision to leave or join the Meeting, etc.), may request that Oversight recruit a Clearness Committee to help them make their decision. Clearness committees are always appointed in the case of marriages being taken under the care of the Meeting and when individuals apply for membership, both of which decisions must be approved by the Meeting as a whole, with the advice of the Oversight Committee.

[22] The QUEST program is an internship program sponsored by the Meeting which places full-time interns in non-profit organizations working for social change in the Seattle area. The interns serve for one year in exchange for receive room & board, medical insurance, a bus pass, and $85/month.

[23] Worship Groups are fledgling Friends Meetings which have not yet been accepted as Monthly Meetings by the Yearly Meeting. Such groups are usually "adopted" by a nearby Monthly Meeting which helps them get established in keeping with the "good order of Friends."

Volumes have been written on what it takes to be a good Clerk. The Clerk is not a minister, not a chief executive, and not even a leader in any active sense or in the way religious officials are in most other denominations. The Clerk has no special role in Meeting for Worship. At least among unprogrammed Friends, there is no minister. Worship is leaderless. Individuals wait in silence to hear and feel the presence of God (also called the Inner Light, the Divine, the Inward Teacher, or the Spirit) and if they feel 'led" to share what they perceive of that Light, they stand and speak. Time is left between speakers for all to take in the Truth in what was said and in order to maintain a meditative, "centered" state of expectant listening for the Spirit.[24]

The Clerk has no official spiritual authority, and no unilateral decisionmaking authority. The primary function of the Clerk is to facilitate the process of collective discernment during Meetings for Business. Technical responsibilities of the Clerk usually include the following:

- preparing the agenda for the Meeting for Business and arranging for committee clerks and others to present reports, concerns, or proposals relevant to the issues being discussed (at UFM the Clerk carries this out with the Coordinating Committee);

- presiding over the Meeting for Business, including judging when unity has been reached and proposing minutes which express the sense of the meeting;

- after action has been taken by the Meeting, notifying the persons involved of the decision made and making sure that they understand their responsibilities in carrying out the decision;

- faithfully attending Meeting for Worship;

- attending meetings of the Worship and Ministry and Oversight Committees and generally keeping up to date on the work of all committees in order to be aware of the condition of the Meeting;

- directing correspondence which comes to the Meeting (at UFM, this is done by the Office Coordinator);

- signing all official documents and minutes, including certificates of transfer, minutes for sojourning members, traveling minutes and letter of introduction, etc. (at UFM,

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[24] I am capitalizing the word Truth intentionally, despite the obvious faux pas with respect to postmodern epistemology. Quakers believe that there is one Truth (though it changes and no one person has infallible access to it) which is somewhere between the conventional Christian concept of "God's will"--an omniscient understanding of the world--and the Buddhist concept of "oneness" or the Taoist concept of "chi" indicating that all of existential reality is connected and infused with a life force of divine energy. When Quakers refer to this meaning of the word Truth, they capitalize it. In any case, it doesn't quite correspond to the old Hegelian, Enlightenment meaning that postmodernists have rejected.

this responsibility is divided between the Recording and Statistical Clerks, depending on the document);

- coordinating the activities of the Meeting with those of the Quarterly and Yearly Meetings of which it is a part (UFM delegates this responsibility to representatives appointed by the Meeting for such a purpose, though the Clerk must keep abreast of their activities.)

In carrying out these duties--especially during Meetings for Business--the ideal Clerk exhibits an almost saintly wisdom and restraint and an uncanny capacity to read people. Only highly respected Friends are asked to serve as Clerk. Douglas Steere lists some of the more important qualities necessary:

'He or she is a good listener, has a clear mind that can handle issues, has the gift of preparing a written minute that can succinctly sum up the sense of the meeting, and is one who has faith in the presuppositions that were mentioned earlier: faith in the presence of a Guide; faith in the deep revelatory genius of such a meeting to arrive at a decision that may break new ground and yet may in fresh ways be in keeping with the Society of Friends' deepest testimonies; and faith in each of those present being potentially the vehicle of the fresh resolving insight. With all of this, a good clerk is a person who refuses to be hurried and can weary out dissension with a patience borne of the confidence that there is a way through, although the group may have to return again and again to the issue before clearness comes and a proper decision is reached."[25]

Basically, the Clerk has primary responsibility for seeing that the decisionmaking process works as it should. Clerks do not *lead* this process, however. They are expected to remain neutral and to 'be chary...of making known their own views" at any point during the discussion. As NPYM's *Faith and Practice* says, the Clerk's job 'is not to express his or her own views, but to see that others present participate as fully as possible in the business and that a few do not dominate it."[26]

Thus the Clerk is charged with the dual task not only of preventing others from dominating the discussion, but of refraining from the temptation to dominate themselves. This involves

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[25] quoted in Michael Sheeran's *Beyond Majority Rule: Voteless Decisions in the Religious Society of Friends.* p.91.

[26] *Faith and Practice,* p.82.

drawing out and eliciting the opinions of silent Friends, so that a hidden opposition will not emerge *after* a decision has been made and undermine the group's commitment to carrying it out. It also involves keeping the pace of the discussion productive and efficient. The Clerk may need to intervene diplomatically when a speaker is being particularly long-winded or is repeating a point that has already been made. The most important and demanding part of the Clerk's job, however, is the dual task of judging when the Meeting has reached "unity" on a decision and "gathering the sense of the meeting." To understand the complexity of this task and its relevance to our discussion of oligarchy, one must understand the context of the process it facilitates: the Quaker process of voteless decision-making.

Coming to Unity: Beyond Majority Rule, Beyond Consensus

It is often said that Quakers make decisions by consensus, but I found that many Friends--especially the more experienced ones--reject that term. Though it has a similar outward appearance, Friends make a distinction between the secular process of consensus and the 300-year old Quaker process of "gathering the sense of the meeting," an essentially spiritual, almost sacramental process of collective discernment. As the NPYM *Faith and Practice* explains:

> 'The basis for the Quaker method of reaching decisions is a religious one. Friends are expected to come to a Meeting for Business in expectation that the Holy Spirit will lead the assembled body to unity and correct action, and that unity is always possible because the same Light of Truth shines in some measure in every human heart."[27]

Here we see the two foundational beliefs underlying Friends decision-making, whether it be in committee meetings or in Monthly, Quarterly, or Yearly Meetings for Business. One is the idea that there is "that of God in everyone"--that the "same Light of Truth shines in some measure in every human heart" and is connected to that which is Divine in everyone else and in all of creation. Consequently, there is no need for a spiritual "go-between" such as a priest or minister to interpret or relay God's will. So follows the second belief, that unity is always possible because God's will is revealed directly to the collectivity of believers when they come together in worship.

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[27] *Faith and Practice*, op. cit., p.74.

Silence is also a key element of their decisionmaking process. Quakers love silence! A favorite Quaker bumper sticker reads: "Quaker on board: in case of emergency, please be quiet!" It is important to point out that the Meeting for Business is undertaken in the same expectant waiting for guidance as does the Meeting for Worship. This is why it is often referred to as "Meeting for Worship for the Conduct of Business"--as a reminder to Friends that decisions are not to be made as they are in secular organizations, but in a Quakerly "spirit of worship." So there are periods of silence at the beginning and at the end of Meeting for Business. Silence is also often called for when a discussion begins to get heated and polarized, in order to bring Friends back to an attitude of "worshipful listening." In Meeting for Business, as in Meeting for Worship, Friends are reminded that really listening means leaving silent spaces in between speakers so that all may carefully weigh and consider the messages being offered.

How the Process Works

In terms of the mechanics of the process, the life of a Quaker decision goes through several distinct stages.[28] First someone presents the problem, including whatever relevant information is known. If the concern is being brought by a committee, this often includes some kind of proposal or recommendation by the committee. The presentation is usually made either by the clerk of the committee or the Clerk of the Meeting.

After the presentation, discussion begins. The preliminary stage of the discussion is somewhat informal and tentative. Friends ask questions or offer points of clarification and information. Although each Friend always stands to speak and there is still silence left between messages, this part of the discussion may feel more like a brainstorming session, where ideas and possible alternatives are thrown into the pot for consideration. Exploratory objections are also offered. A Friend making an objection at this point in the discussion is not usually taking a hard stand, but rather making others aware of a potential difficulty with the proposal or testing the waters to see if the objection is held by others as well. Morley (1993) also notes that this stage of the discussion is when Friends whose emotions have been aroused should be allowed to release

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[28] These stages have been described in various ways by different observers. The description here incorporates my own observations and the progression outlined by Michael Sheeran and Barry Morley.

those feelings, and while this is much less acceptable later on, one may hear harsh words, tears, or loud and angry voices at this early stage. In short, it is the time for getting initial reactions out on the table without being criticized, corrected, or otherwise be held accountable.

At some point the discussion enters a more serious phase. Comments become less tentative and more considered judgments and conclusions are offered. Friends will start to piggy-back on each others' comments, trying to build toward a cumulative solution. Brief comments of support will be heard ('Friend speaks my mind," or 'I can unite with that'). More serious objections are articulated carefully. This is when, as Morley (1993) puts it, Friends let go of their emotional attachments and their partiality and change to a 'long focus"--to look toward finding a solution that will be best for the whole group, allowing the Meeting to "reside in the Light."

If the tide of the discussion is running in several directions and there is no emerging unity around any one option, the Clerk may decide that the question should be tabled until the next meeting. More information may be required and/or it may be that Friends simply need time to 'labor over" the issue. This happens quite often. The default rule of thumb is: when in doubt, give it more time. As Brinton notes:

> 'In the transaction of business the meeting assumes that it will be able to act as a unit. No vote is ever taken. If a high degree of unity cannot be reached, the meeting does not act."[29]

On the other hand, if it seems that the group is closing in on a single position, the Clerk is expected to judge that unity is emerging and to propose a tentative minute expressing the sense of the meeting as s/he has heard it in the discussion. When a minute is proposed, there are two questions each person must answer. First, Friends may object that the minute does not reflect the drift of the discussion--it is not what people have been saying. Although an experienced Clerk will rarely make this kind of mistake, should it occur, someone will invariably point it out and discussion will continue to reformulate the minute. Second, if the minute *did* in fact represent the

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[29] Howard Brinton, *Guide to Quaker Practice*, p.38.

general thrust of the discussion, then each person must ask themselves whether or not they feel comfortable supporting it. There are three ways to indicate dissent from a proposed minute:

"I Disagree but Do Not Wish to Stand in the Way." Also called "standing aside," this is the mildest form of formal dissent. Friends who disapprove of the direction the Meeting is going may decide in the end to withdraw their opposition but not their disagreement. This means that their objection is not serious enough to prevent the Meeting from going forward. The Meeting is aware of the dissenter's opinion, and a dissenter can feel comfortable that his/her own leading has not been compromised because it has been voiced and considered. At the same time, such a dissenter also feels some responsibility for supporting the decision. After all, s/he *could* have stopped it had they really felt strongly about it, but instead publically chose to trust the leadings of the rest of the Meeting.

"Please Minute Me as Opposed." This is a more serious objection and far less common. In fact, as Sheeran notes, in many Meetings it has lapsed into complete disuse. When it is used, however, the minute expressing the sense of the meeting will explicitly note the person's opposition. The group is still left free to proceed, but in such a case it will do so with much more hesitation. The action will be undertaken in a more experimental, tentative way than if the objection had been withdrawn (as above).

"I am Unable to Unite with the Proposal." This is the most serious form of objection. It expresses a fundamental, moral disagreement with the proposed minute such that the individual is not willing to stand aside and let the Meeting move forward. In virtually all cases, even if only one person is unable to unite, the Meeting will not proceed. If time is crucial and/or the objection seems to the Clerk to be frivolous, the Clerk *may* appeal to the objector to withdraw the objection or consent to be minuted as opposed. Usually, however, the action is delayed and taken up again at a later meeting. On *extremely* rare occasions, the Meeting may decide to proceed despite such an objection. This decision is not made lightly, and depends on at least four factors: a) how many objectors there are; b) the reputation and degree of general respect for the objector's wisdom and sensitivity; c) the importance of the issue or principle motivating the objection; and d) the importance of the issue to the most respected advocate for the other side.

Thus, it is a myth that "unity" requires unanymity, but in practice almost all heartfelt objections registered in this way have enough weight to block an action. As was the case with the gay and lesbian marriage issue at UFM, a Meeting may take years to reach unity, with only one or two people consistently blocking. In other cases, what begins as the objection of a small but persistent minority, over the years becomes the sense of the meeting. This was the case with the decision against slavery in the 18th century among Quakers--a decision which began with a lone dissenter who could not advocate slavery and ended decades later when the first Meeting reached unity in favor of abolition.

The final stage of the process is when unity is reached. Morley calls this stage the "transition to Light." Unity is indicated when a silence falls over the Meeting after the reading of the minute. In Morley's poetic description:

> "As we continue to address an issue, as we lay aside any need to win, as we turn increasingly inward in order to transcend differences, long focus brings us to the Source of resolution and clarity...When we feel the Presence settle among us, and silence overtakes us, we have arrived where we want to be. Silence is an inward and outward sign that the process has been completed. A sensitive clerk will allow the silence to linger."[30]

Especially in the case of a very difficult decision which the group has labored hard and long over, Friends report that this silence is an incredible spiritual experience. It represents the point at which the Spirit is no longer moving anyone present to speak in dissent; that the minute as read in fact represents the Truth. They believe that the group has been led by the Spirit to the "right" decision, endorsed not only by the members of the group, but by the Divine which is present in each of them. A meeting which experiences this sense of "the Presence" or "residing in the Light" is called a "covered" or "gathered" meeting.

Differences Between Sense of the Meeting and Consensus

In *Beyond Consensus: Salvaging Sense of the Meeting*, Barry Morley argues that there is a crucial difference between the Quaker process of sense of the meeting and the secular process of

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[30] Barry Morley, *Beyond Consensus: Salvaging Sense of the Meeting.* p.19.

consensus. In fact, he says, when Quaker process works well it is because they have gathered the sense of the meeting and when it fails, it is because Friends have resorted instead to operating by consensus. Putting aside the apparent tautology of this logic, we are left with the empirical question of whether or not there really is a difference between the two processes, and if so, what exactly is it? On the one hand, Quakers must be doing *something* differently if they've managed to maintain their organizational integrity for over 300 years using this process of self-governance, while most secular organizations using consensus seem either to disolve in frustration and paralysis or give up and go back to majority rule. On the other hand, perhaps Quakers are just better at it because they've had more practice. If there really is a difference between the two, how much of it is really procedural and how much is ideological or cultural? In other words, are there actually differences in what they do or only in what they *believe* about what they do?[31] From my own investigations, it appears that there are in fact differences of both kinds. Compared to consensus, sense of the meeting is based on a different set of assumptions about the nature of the process, there is a different atmosphere and a different code of conduct in effect while decisions are being made, a different kind of result is achieved, and the process of sense of the meeting serves a different function in the organization as a whole.

As mentioned above, the belief that there is 'that of God in everyone" and the belief in direct and continual revelation underly the process of Quaker decision-making. Building on these beliefs, Friends have a fundamentally different conception of what is happening when the group gathers to make a decision than that of most secular groups in Western societies. Because there is that of God in everyone, no one's opinion may be ignored or overridden. When an individual speaks, s/he is not merely speaking as a human being, but as an instrument of the Divine, so Friends are obliged to listen and respond to 'the spirit" of the message behind its often imperfect articulation. Because the solution being sought is thought to be Divine revelation, the process is

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[31] When we discuss the applicability and mobility of the Quaker organizational form to other kinds of organizations, the important question will be whether a group can simply adopt the mechanical form of the process or if the belief system is a crucial element in making it work. The discussion (in the Conclusion) will be necessarily speculative, because without doing an extensive ethnographic study, it is impossible to tell to what degree the belief system is what sustains the structure and to what degree it is the other way around.

not conceived of as a competition among self-interested individuals, but a collective seeking for what is "right" for the group--a spiritual rather than an intellectual process. As Morley explains:

> '[C]onsensus is achieved through a process of reasoning in which reasonable people search for a satisfactory decision. But in seeking the sense of the meeting we open ourselves to being guided to perfect resolution in Light, to a place where we sit in unity in the collective inward Presence. Through consensus we decide it; through sense of the meeting we turn it over, allowing it to be decided."[32]

This sense of 'letting go" or 'turning it over" and of being impartial occurs over and over in descriptions of Quaker process. One of Morley's respondent's said 'Consensus is the product of willfulness. We will ourselves to a decision. Sense of the meeting is a product of will*ing*ness in which we allow ourselves to be led. It is the difference between reason and faith."[33]

The second important difference between sense of the meeting and consensus is in the attitude and code of conduct expected of the participants. To prevent the process from becoming contentious and competitive, Friends are encouraged to speak from the heart and use 'simple speech," rather than fancy rhetoric or manipulative oratory. It is not to be a debate, with one person trying to out-speak, interrupt, or intimidate another, as the following excerpt from the London Yearly Meeting's *Book of Discipline* makes clear:

> "As it is our hope that in our Meetings for Discipline the will of God shall prevail rather than the desires of men, we do not set great store by rhetoric or clever argument. The mere gaining of debating points is found to be unhelpful and alien to the spirit of worship which should govern the rightly ordered Meeting. Instead of rising hastily to reply to another, it is better to give time for what has been said to make its own appeal, and to take its right place in the mind of the Meeting"[34]

And as Brinton points out, attempts to stir up emotions and passionate pleas are not acceptable either. Again, the Quaker 'spirit of worship" makes for a very different atmosphere from what often transpires in secular meetings, even where consensus is used as a way of being more democratic:

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[32] Morley, op. cit. p.5

[33] Ibid. p.5.

[34] Quoted in Sheeran, op. cit. p.48.

'Eloquence which appeals to emotion is out of place. Those who come to the meeting not so much to discover Truth as to win acceptance of their opinions may find that their views carry little weight. Opinions should always be expressed humbly and tentatively in the realization that no one person sees the whole truth and that the whole meeting can see more of Truth than can any part of it.'[35]

While there are no official "rules" and hence no explicit punishments for any of these offenses, these "advices" nevertheless have the weight of social sanction behind them. Speech that seems put on or self-important, or anything that seems rehearsed or prepared usually has the opposite of the desired effect; it is not received as a Divinely inspired message. Friends are only supposed to speak when they feel *moved* to speak. Consequently, anyone who speaks too often begins to lose credibility. Individuals who act or speak inappropriately are sanctioned, either by the Clerk or by the rest of the Meeting. The Clerk will often avoid acknowledging someone who has already spoken more than their share, and will dole out subtle reminders to people not to repeat a point which has already been made, not to interrupt, not to speak too long, etc. While these reminders are kind-hearted and even coded, they are nonetheless effective. If this isn't enough, there is also the social sanctioning of the group. Sheeran describes how Friends often react to unacceptable rhetoric and persuasive speech:

'On the rare occasions when such speech happens, no comment is normally made; instead the discussion continues, the following speakers pointedly ignoring the offender's remarks. In the coffee break which next occurs, one is likely to overhear such wisps of conversation as, 'John should know better than to speak like that,' or, 'If there's one thing that winds me down, it's the way Susan tries to get us all wound up.' This is one form of the social sanctioning wryly described by Quakers as the 'Philadelphia Treatment.''[36]

The third difference between consensus and sense of the meeting is that sense of the meeting--when it works the way it is supposed to--produces a different kind of decision than consensus. The fundamental insight here is that if a group avoids contentious debate, it won't get bogged down in an unproductive battle between two or three entrenched positions; instead it will put that energy into finding a better solution. Consensus, unless it is modified by some of the

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[35] From Brinton's *Creative Worship*, Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1963, p.93-94

[36] Sheeran, op. cit. p.56.

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specific injunctions mentioned above, usually results in decisions which are a compromise. If the participants are primarily concerned with protecting their own individual interests, then in order for everyone to agree to a solution, each person ends up giving something up in order to get something of their original proposal. Consequently, most of the participants are only partially happy with the outcome. With sense of the meeting, a solution emerges which is often fundamentally different than anything any individual initially wanted. In S.B. Laughlin's words, 'The final result is not a compromise of conflicting views but a synthesis of the best thought of all--a case where two and two make five." The outcome is qualitatively different and greater than the sum of its parts. Brinton describes the distinction in similar terms:

> 'The voting method, depending as it does on quantitative relations, is mechanical; the Friends' method of attaining results exhibits principles typical of organic growth. The synthesis of a variety of elements is often obtained by a kind of cross-fertilization, and the final result is not therefore, or at least ought not to be, a compromise."[37]

Friends often speak of being surprised at the solution the group came up with--that it was better than any of the original ideas people had proposed. This kind of "organic growth" has important implications for the maintenance of the organization. If decisions always feel like compromises, if individuals always feel as if they are fighting for their way and only ever get part of what they want, they will never be completely satisfied with the direction the group takes. There is not enough pay off for the long, arduous, process of forging consensus. Resentment mounts and frustration builds until, eventually, participants simply leave the group in frustration or opt for the "more efficient" path of majority rule. Anyone who has ever been involved in a consensus-based organization can tell stories of this kind of development. As Morley notes, Quaker Meetings who lapse into using consensus are proned to the same fate:

> 'Consensus is a process in which adjustments and compromises are made for the purpose of reaching a decision that all of us can accept...Because everyone has given up something to attain consensus commitment to the conclusion is often shallow. In one way or another we make decisions by 'going along.' This is the weakness of consensus and a reason it frequently breaks down. Sense of the meeting, on the other hand, fosters powerful commitment.

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[37] Brinton, op. cit. p.42.

I can give examples of monthly meetings which nearly tore themselves apart by forcing consensus rather than reaching the sense of the meeting. Arms get twisted, individuals lobbied, and telephone campaigns mounted. I know of meetings from which members withdrew because of the pressure. I know of meetings which suffer extended residual distress."[38]

This brings us to the last important distinction between consensus and sense of the meeting, which is that the two decision-making processes serve different functions in the organizations. We have just seen how sense of the meeting can generate a powerful sense of commitment to the decisions it produces. It also generates a strong sense of community and trust among the members of the Meeting, which helps to keep the Meeting functioning smoothly. Morley suggests that this is due to the nature of the decision-making process. Sense of the meeting, as a process, does not exist to produce decisions. In sociological terms, it's purpose is to build community. In Morley's terms, it's 'to gather ourselves in unity in the presence of Light." The decision is a 'by-product" which 'happens along the way."[39] It's the distinction between forging unity in order to make decisions (consensus) versus making decisions in order to reach unity:

'Because coming to a sense of the meeting involves the way Quakers make decisions, it is easy to assume that its *purpose* is to make decisions. And since its purpose seems to be to make decisions unanimously...it is easy to call it consensus. The purpose of consensus is to produce a product. It is aimed at a decision. The pursuit of the sense of the meeting involves nurturing a process which is completed when God's recognizable presence settles over us in silence."[40]

This distinction between process and product is at the core of Quaker culture and is what likens it to various radical movements, including the Women's Peace Movement, deep ecologists, socialist anarchists, and others which make up what Epstein calls the 'Non-violent Direct Action Movement" and which many European scholars have labeled New Social Movements. What all of these groups have in common is a commitment to removing the distinction between means and ends, to making the process of their interaction with each other morally consistent with the goals of that interaction. While these other movement groups are trying to use consensus to achieve

[38] Morley, op. cit. p.6.

[39] Ibid. p.15.

[40] Ibid. p.11.

that consistency, and Quakers are using sense of the meeting, in either case it is a commitment which, as Morley points out, is completely out of sinc with the values of modern society:

> 'We are products of a culture committed to products. The process by which we produce the products is, at best, secondary. Whether the product be a car or a victory or a decision, how we get it seems less important than *that* we get it. It matters only peripherally that factory workers are bored and angry, that college athletics are corrupt and exploitive, that arms are twisted and time pressures imposed in order to get decisions made...In seeking the sense of the meeting, process is paramount."[41]

Because this kind of means/ends consistency is so anathema to the existing cultural imperatives of the larger society, maintaining a community or a movement which operates on that basis is extremely difficult. This, of course, was Michels' point when he first formulated his 'iron law of oligarchy," although the German Social Democratic Party--his object of study--was trying to maintain a *much* different kind of democratic process than the one being described here. He assumed that efficiency of production was more important than the maintenance of an egalitarian community (product over process), and that is why he expected all organizations to adopt bureaucratic structures. But the Quakers show us that the opposite orientation--process over product--can in fact be sustainable under certain conditions.

Not all Quaker Meetings are successful at utilizing sense of the meeting. In fact, the motivation behind Morley's pamplet on sense of the meeting was that too many Meetings were reverting to using consensus and he wanted to mobilize a resurgence and rediscovery of what he feels is the most important Quaker birthright. What I have described here is something of an ideal type which most Meetings approximate to greater or lesser degree. The following story of how one Meeting eventually found unity on a highly divisive issue is also the story of how they learned to use sense of the meeting rather than consensus. After telling the story of how UFM navigated this particular decision, I will argue that nothing we would normally call an oligarchy exists in this organization. Finally, I will discuss what conditions seem to be required for this organizational structure--its authority structure and underlying principles--to sustain itself *without* developing an oligarchy.

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[41] Ibid. p.22.

Queer Friends: Challenging Conceptions of Marriage and Community

From March of 1981 until May of 1992, University Friends Meeting in Seattle, Washington struggled with the issue of how to deal with same-sex marriages. This was not actually one decision which took eleven years to make, but rather several separate decisions having to do with the same general issue, which was never really resolved until a general policy decision was made eleven years later. From the beginning, it was fairly clear that UFM felt ready to take same-sex relationships under its care, although at times even that point was contested. For the most part, however, the question was *how* such relationships would be dealt with: whether they would be called "marriages" and whether the public rituals marking them would be called "weddings," "ceremonies of commitment," "celebrations of commitment," or something else. Resolving the issue required members of the Meeting to reevaluate deeply held beliefs about homosexuality, the nature of marriage and family, the relationship between sexuality and spirituality, the nature of unity, the meaning of the Quaker testimony on equality, and the tension in the Meeting's obligations to "care" for committed relationships versus its obligations as a "marriage agent" for the State. The decision went through several stages. What follows is a recounting of some of the highlights.

In March of 1981, two women submitted a request to have their relationship taken under the care of the Meeting. As is the usual procedure for marriage requests, the Oversight Committee appointed a "clearness committee" to meet with the two women and make sure that they were ready to take this step. At the June business meeting, Oversight recommended that the Meeting accept their request, but that it be called a "celebration of commitment" because they couldn't reach unity about the couple's request to call it a marriage. There was lengthy discussion in both the June and July meetings, and in September (there is no August Meeting), the Meeting approved a celebration of commitment for the two women.

Two years later, in September of 1983, Oversight recommended a heterosexual couple for "marriage." The Meeting approved, but two lesbian women asked to be minuted as standing aside, noting the difference in the depth and length of discussion for this marriage as compared

with the lesbian celebration of commitment two years earlier.[42] In May of 1985, the precedent having been set, the Meeting approved another celebration of commitment for a gay male couple without incident.

While the Meeting had yet to consider any kind of policy minute, the pattern of decisions about specific marriage requests revealed a *de facto* double standard: heterosexual couples were being allowed to call their relationships whatever they wanted (presumably marriage), while gay and lesbian couples could call their relationships anything *except* marriage--their ceremonies were only being approved as "celebrations of commitment." As this implicit double standard gradually became more obvious, it caused increasing tension in the Meeting. Deeply held moral convictions were being challenged on all sides. Many felt there should be a single standard for all relationships, and that anything else was discriminatory and hurtful. Others felt that the term "marriage" specifically referred to a sacred covenant between a man, a woman, and God--that homosexual and heterosexual relationships were qualitatively different and should therefore have different names. At least one member objected to what he saw as a "special interest group" (i.e. gays and lesbians) trying to "use" the Meeting to pursue a political agenda of legalizing same-sex marriages.

Towards the end of 1985, the Meeting began in earnest to work through the issues. In December, 1985 Oversight took the first step toward a policy decision by distributing two draft minutes for "seasoning": one saying that same-sex unions would be called "celebrations of commitment", one allowing the couple to name it as they chose. This was not a formal proposal. Members were asked to give feedback to the committee.[43] Meanwhile, Worship Sharing Groups

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[42] The UFM minutes indicates a slight variation in UFM's practice as compared with Sheeran's description. When Friends want to express official concern but do not want to stand in the way of a decision, they are "minuted as standing aside." This seems to correspond with Sheeran's option of being "minuted as opposed." The more informal withdrawal of opposition is also called "standing aside," but is not minuted. Moreover, sometimes the name of the individual(s) is given and sometimes not over the years, a practice which seems to depend on the Recording Clerk's preference. I should note that the frequent lack of names in the miutes made the reconstruction of the story and the dynamics among members difficult, but in most cases I could who the minutes were referring to by "triangulating" with what I had learned from my interviews.

[43] Almost all Quaker decisions go through a process of "seasoning" in which Friends give prayerful consideration to a draft minute for some length of time before being asked to consider an actual proposal. At the

began a six-month series of meetings in members' homes to discuss the care of committed relationships. An outside facilitator led a workshop on 'Finding Unity in Diversity" in June of '87, and in November, a Special Called Meeting was held to consider same-gender relationships. Again, the meeting was presented as a forum for the expression of views, in which a decision *might* be reached, but that no decision was necessary.

The temperature rose in 1987 and '88, as Meetings for Worship became fraught with 'leadings" on same-sex marriage, which sometimes included personal attacks and name-calling. Almost every Meeting for Business dealt with some aspect of the issue. In December of 1987, two members brought a letter "speaking for 20 other members" to Meeting for Business "affirming that marriage is a commitment between a man and a woman and God." One member spoke so long in support of the letter that another person tried to make him sit down and seven people walked out of the meeting. By July of 1988, the members of Oversight Committee reported they could not in good conscience recommend that *any* relationships--gay or straight--be taken under the care of the Meeting. While one member considered this unilateral decision a way of 'holding marriage hostage," Oversight explained that the 'moratorium on relationships" would hopefully only last until November, by which time they hoped to have a report for the Meeting on their standing on the issue. The moratorium ended in December, but the committee did not have clearness to present the report as a proposal, so no decision was requested of the Meeting.

The conflict over this issue was so deep by now that it was affecting all aspects of Meeting life. The membership request of a gay man was hotly debated in two Meetings for Business after one long-time member said he thought the Meeting was already over half gay and he didn't think they needed any more. A minute stating that the Meeting didn't have unity to approve *any* membership request almost passed. Concerns on the part of a few members about "special interest groups" using the Meeting for political goals led to extended discussion about the relationship between Meeting and 'independent groups" comprised of UFM members. While this discussion was aimed at Unviersity Friends for Gay and Lesbian Concerns, it had ramifications for all such

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Yearly Meeting level, draft minutes are circulated among affiliated Monthly Meetings for up to a year before a formal proposal is considered in Annual Session.

groups within the Meeting. The community suffered in other ways too. Physical and financial contributions began lagging, and a Threshing Session on Stewardship was called to discuss the "physical, financial, and spiritual stewardship of the Meeting community" and address a budget deficit. Perhaps most telling is the fact that the Meeting was unable to approve the State of the Meeting Report for 1988--a report filed every year with North Pacific Yearly Meeting--because they couldn't come to unity on a description of their status in dealing with same-sex marriages.

After two Threshing Sessions, multiple discussions, and much laboring, there were signs that the tide was turning by mid-1989. The State of the Meeting Report for 1989 was approved after the first draft was revised to reflect a more optimistic feeling among the members. For example, the last paragraph in the first draft read:

> "Clearly, UFM does not have unity on this question [same-sex marriage]; and also has no unity on whether the issue should be laid down. We are working hard to sustain loving relationships among our members and attenders, using Friendly process that the Spirit within each one of us can direct our corporate life."[44]

When the draft was considered, the first sentence, indicating a virtual impasse, was changed to a much less dire prognosis: "UFM has not yet found words to express what unity may be emerging as we continue to heed the Light given us." In July of 1989, another heterosexual marriage was approved after much discussion, and a minute proposed by the Coordinating Committee to state the Meeting's current practice on relationships (basically stating the double standard) was laid over, probably out of fear that it would have the weight of policy. At the next meeting in September, the Peace and Social Concerns Committee proposed a minute that *would* set policy. It read:

> "It is in keeping with the Quaker testimony of equality that relationships between two people be acknowledged, accepted and cared for without distinction as to sexual orientation or gender. We propose that we offer each couple the opportunity to select the title of their ceremony and relationship. We respect the sincerity of those who may disagree and we believe their objections should be appropriately noted, but we urge the Meeting to accept this minute."[45]

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[44] *UFM State of the Meeting Report,* drafted May, 1989.

[45] UFM Minutes, September, 1989 Meeting for Business.

There was more unity on the first sentence than on the second. Several people were standing in the way on the issue of naming. Peace and Social Concerns asked for letters and input from members and the minute was held over. The next month's three-hour discussion on the minute was contentious, but eventually they came to unity on the following, slightly revised minute:

> "University Friends Meeting believes it is in keeping with the Quaker testimony of equality that loving relationships between two people be acknowledged, accepted, and cared for without distinction as to sexual orientation or gender."

With two objections noted (including one to the process) *and* two people minuted as standing aside, this hardly seemed like a "covered" meeting. In fact, one member commented after the minute had been read that "this process was another event in the history of violence on this issue" and another that "many people have shown a great lack of respect for others." [46] In any case, it was the first time in eight years they had come to unity on a statement of policy, albeit in the form of an abstract principle. It would take another unity about what the "equality minute" would mean in practice.

Over the next few months, several minutes were proposed on how to implement the equality minute. During one such discussion, one of the Friends (an elder "weighty" Friend) changed his position on the equality minute from standing aside to opposed, and expressed his concern that the Meeting was being "badgered" into accepting homosexual marriage, that "the minute [then being proposed] was an artfully worded statement to avoic the issue that there are two categories of marriage, that we should not corrupt the meaning of language, and that conniving means and manipulation were being used." [47] A diverse ad hoc committee was formed, including Friends on all sides of the issue, and at the same time, having an immediate decision to make regarding a lesbian couple who had requested marriage, the Meeting decided that until something better was decided, "ceremony of commitment" would be used for *all* couples. The ad hoc committee was

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[46] The "equality minute" and these comments both taken from the October 1989 UFM minutes.

[47] From the March, 1990 minutes. The minute being referred to was a lengthy statement which would have called all ceremonies "ceremonies of union" and for those allowed to marry legally, "ceremonies of union and legal marriage."

still at an impasse a year later and asked to be laid down, but the "moratorium on marriage" lasted until May of 1992, when the Meeting finally came to unity on the same-sex marriage issue.

The final leg of the journey, and as many of my informants told me, the crucial turning point in this struggle, came at the end of 1991. It had been a year and a half since the Meeting had last tried to come to unity on the marriage question, but the contentious atmosphere of the Meeting had done much damage to the community. In the span of a month, Oversight received nine letters from gays and lesbians requesting that their membership be transfered to the nearby Salmon Bay Meeting. A member who had died of AIDS asked his care committee to see that certain members not attend his memorial service. Friends transferring from other Meetings had been taken aside and felt asked to "choose sides." Oversight felt that even though the issue remained unresolved, something should be done to heal the wounds inflicted on the Meeting. They drafted a letter to the gays and lesbians who had left the Meeting, asking them to return, and took it to the Coordinating Committee. Coordinating Committee thought that the Meeting should reach out to everyone who had been hurt, not just gays and lesbians. They asked that the letter not be brought as a proposal yet, but that Oversight should describe its process and ask the Meeting what might be done to address the hurt and isolation so many felt. There was a lengthy discussion, which took up most of the December 1991 and January 1992 Meetings for Business in which "Meeting was not being asked to settle disagreements or the issue of same gender marriage, but rather to identify areas of pain, isolation, and alienation and possible ways to heal that." The discussion was less contentious and produced a lot of good ideas for things individuals and the Meeting as a whole could do to bring about healing and reconciliation. One of those ideas was carried out in April, when a five-hour Meeting for Unity was held. Those in attendance were asked to talk about what made them feel like a community and to generate a list of things that help and hinder the process of coming to unity.

The following month, another couple asked to have their relationship taken under the care of the Meeting. It was a heterosexual couple, and the woman was a long-time, birthright Friend as well as the daughter of a weighty elder Friend who had been very active in helping the Meeting work through this issue. The daughter asked if their union could be called a marriage, but only if everyone could have the same privilege. Oversight put the question before the Meeting of whether couples could be allowed to name their ceremonies and relationships however they chose. This

time, there was a calm, gathered discussion. One of the last holdouts against same-sex marriage rose to withdraw his opposition. The Clerk, who as fate would have it, was one of the women who had first been taken under the care of the Meeting in 1981, gathered the sense of the Meeting carefully. She noted that many Friends were absent and asked what to do. Those present felt a strong sense of being "gathered in the Presence" and said it would be a tragedy not to acknowledge the "strong and deep sense of the unity the Meeting had reached." After eleven years, the following minute was approved, with no one objecting and no one minuted as standing aside:

> "At the May, 1992 Business Meeting of Unversity Friends Meeting, the sense of the meeting was very strong that we are ready to support couples in naming their own relationships as we take them under our care."[48]

Over the next week, the Clerk and Recording Clerk called all those not present when unity was reached whom they thought might question the minute. They asked if anyone wanted to revisit the issue the following month. No one stood in the way.

Evidence Against Oligarchy

We are now ready to evaluate whether or not there was an oligarchy operating in University Friends Meeting during this period. Recall that we defined oligarchy as *the concentration of governing power in the hands of a minority, such that* de facto, *whatever this minority wants is what comes to pass, even if it goes against the wishes of the majority.* We want to ascertain whether or not a *minority* of the members and attenders at UFM was essentially "calling the shots" in the governance of the Meeting--across issues and over time--such that if a *majority* opposed what was going on, they would be unable to effectively turn the tide. Two points are important in applying this definition. First, we must show that a *minority* ruled. The mere existence of social influence--even if it is used to pressure a few people into going along with undesired outcomes--does not suffice to prove oligarchy. It would merely be evidence of majority rule, and while it would indicate a serious breakdown of Quaker process, such a state of affairs would nevertheless be approvingly called "democracy" in most other organizations. The silencing

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[48] Minutes from the May, 1992 Meeting for Business.

of dissent, if it occurs, must be effective enough to squelch *majority* opposition and must be exerted by a consistent, cohesive elite over time in order qualify as oligarchic control.

Second, we would not ordinarily be able to determine minority domination of governance by examining only a single decision. "Governance of the Meeting" implies control of the broad spectrum of decisions affecting the life of the organization. In this case, however, our focus on the issue of same-sex marriages seems justified, since resolving it involved a number of incremental sub-decisions, and because the issue bled over into so many other areas of concern in Meeting life (as one member put it, related issues started 'bubbling up like yeast'). Examining the political dynamics of this issue in fact gives us a good idea as to the general power structure of the Meeting during this period.

On the basis of the above definition, then, how does one determine if an oligarchy is exercising governing power in actual practice? I will suggest that if an oligarchy had existed at UFM during this period, we would expect to see at least some of the following indications:

1. *Minority dominance in decision-making*--evidence that a minority could officially or unofficially control the decision-making process, i.e. that a majority actually opposed same-sex marriages and were somehow overpowered; finding a lack of opportunities for the expression of dissent, or a punative or silencing atmosphere, to the degree that even if a majority were opposed, they would be unwilling to speak out.

2. *Concentration of resources in the hands of a minority*--evidence that the use or control of rewards and/or resources within the Meeting were concentrated in the hands of a small group.

3. *Lack of leadership turnover*--finding that the same people remained in leadership postions or on particularly influential committees for an extended period of time, or that the process for appointing people to those positions was closed or undemocratic.

4. *Low levels of participation*--finding that a large proportion of the membership did not participate in the governance of the Meeting, i.e. came to Meeting for Worship but did not attend Meeting for Business or serve on committees.

The following discussion will address each of these indicators in turn. I will pay particular attention to the decision-making process and leadership turnover, as they are usually thought to be most crucial in assessing oligarchic control. The concentration of resources, of course, is also crucial, but as will be discussed below, the topic requires little discussion in this case. Also, it important to distinguish between what is *supposed* to happen, in terms of the structure and formal

procedures, and what in fact *does* happen in practice. Especially in the discussion of the first three categories, careful attention to this distinction will help us determine if a minority was able to 'get around" the rules or manipulate them in such a way as to exert dominance.

Minority dominance in decision-making

Before we can determine if a minority dominated the same-sex marriage decision (or the series of sub-decisions surrounding it), we first have to deal with an important question which has a unique importance in consensus-based organizations. I am referring to the question of who counts as an oligarchic minority. In a group where everyone officially has veto power, does the handful of members who consistently stands in the way of a decision count as an oligarchy? If we consider such a minority oligarchic, then the more extreme case must also be true: the lone dissenter who simply won't give in must be considered a ruling minority of one; i.e. a monarch. If that sounds absurd, it is because there is a difference between *blocking* a decision and *making* a decision. If it were just a matter of a minority getting its way, one could certainly argue that those who opposed same-sex marriage were on the 'winning" side of this issue for eleven years. But I would argue that a minority cannot *rule* merely by blocking decisions. Ruling implies an active process of directing the positive actions of a group, not a passive process of preventing action. An oligarchy *imposes* positive decisions on the majority of its constituents (though it may do so without their knowledge, or by means of a hegemonic legitimating ideology); one can *resist* through noncooperation, but one cannot *rule*. In order to say a minority was ruling in the gay/lesbian marriage decision at UFM, therefore, we have to show that those who *favored* same-sex marriage were in fact in the minority and that they were somehow able to affect a positive outcome, despite majority opposition.

In terms of formal structure, it is clear that the official decision-making procedures provide checks on the concentration of power. While it is certainly not a fail-safe process and there is some potential for abuse, the 'rules" on the whole guard against oligarchy. To cite the most important aspects: everyone has veto power in the decision-making process, committees have almost no autonomous decision-making authority, both members and attenders have standing to bring concerns before the Meeting, and even though the Clerk 'gathers" the sense of the Meeting, minutes are not approved until they have been read back to the Meeting and Friends have had a

final chance to express their disapproval. Moreover, at each meeting the minutes from the previous meeting are reviewed and approved before going on.

Despite the safeguards of formal procedure, there are two aspects of the process which could potentially allow for the concentration and abuse of power: the roles of the Clerk and the Coordinating Committee. Clerks officially have no more authority than anyone else, and in fact, are supposed to refrain from making their views known on issues being discussed. At the same time, they are vested with a certain amount of disciplinary power in maintaining good process. There is some discretion afforded in the interpretation of who needs 'Clerk's discipline" and what kinds of actions constitute a breach of process, i.e. it is possible for discretion to be used to "silence" those with unpopular views. The Clerk also has the authority--under certain circumstances and on very rare occasion--to decide that unity has been reached over the objection of one or two dissenters. Likewise, the Coordinating Committee, in preparing the agenda for Meetings for Business and deciding which decisions can be made in committee, could conceiveably make those decisions in such a way as to steer the Meeting, without most members' knowledge, in a direction which was unacceptable to a majority of the Meeting. There is a crucial check on that potential, however, in that it only takes *one person* to find out about such an impropriety and to take their concern directly to Meeting for Business for any such decisions on the part of the committee to be very publically challenged.

In terms of what actually happened in this case, the official decision-making procedures did in fact prevent any minority from dominating the process. I found no evidence to suggest that a majority actually opposed the final decision, or that a minority was manipulating the process in order to impose their will. Two observations lead me to this conclusion. First, the continuing loyalty to the meeting of individuals who had at some point voiced their objections on the same-sex marriage issue. Second, the fact that so much time and energy went into making sure that those who had opposing views had the opportunity to voice their opinion and felt safe doing so.

If a majority of the Meeting had actually opposed gay/lesbian marriage but were overcome by a ruling minority, we would expect to see a good number of the losing side either leave the Meeting after the decision was made or at least there would some indication of widespread discontent. This did not happen, although some people did leave the Meeting. Both the minutes

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and my interviews revealed that there were perhaps a dozen gay and lesbian members and attenders who left the Meeting to join the Salmon Bay Worship Group during this period. They did not, however, leave because the decision went against them. They were clearly in the majority when they left, and they left *before* the decision, not in response to it. According to my informants, several of whom were either among those who left or knew them well, the Salmon Bay group left primarily because they felt uncomfortable being the constant focus of controversy in the Meeting, and because they felt they would be more welcome and understood at Salmon Bay, which was predominantly a gay and lesbian group.

Although there were no precise statistics available, the minutes suggest that there were a few others who left the meeting or began attending less often. I asked specifically if people knew of individuals who opposed the minute leaving because they felt outnumbered or pressured into accepting same-sex marriages. Three or four people were mentioned as having been opposed to some degree and having left at some point. One of these was an elderly woman I spoke with who told me she came to Meeting less often now because of health problems. She also insisted that the process had been more than fair and that she had had every opportunity to speak and be heard. She had opposed calling same-sex relationships marriages, but wanted to find a better term than "ceremony of commitment." She was absent when unity was finally reached, but when the Clerks called her to see if she agreed, she stood aside, saying 'that's not the way I would have liked to see it come out, but I'm glad to see the Meeting has finally come to unity." A second older man who had been quite adamant in his dissent reportedly stopped coming several months after the decision because he lived 80-90 miles away and didn't want to drive that far anymore. He also did not appear to be disgruntled by the decision. At the Meeting when unity was reached, he rose to withdraw his opposition. The next month, he spoke during the closing silence to show his appreciation for the process, as the following excerpt from the minutes indicates:

> '[Man's name] stated that before and after the Meeting on Unity [held one month before the Meeting where unity was reached], a small committee had met with him. He felt listened to and felt closer to Meeting. He compared it to the way he felt after

cleaning lots of unwanted things out of his house. He expressed appreciation for the kindness of this committee."[49]

Of all those I was able to identify who seriously opposed any of the cluster of decisions related to same-sex marriage, only one seems to have left the meeting for reasons having to do with the issue and/or perceived improprieties in the process. This man was the Recording Clerk during the early part of this period. As time went on, he became convinced that gays and lesbians were trying to "use" the Meeting to further a larger political agenda--securing legalization of same-sex marriage at the state level. He was also very sensitive to issues of process and when Oversight decided that they could no longer recommend that any relationships be taken under the care of the Meeting, he interpreted this as "holding marriage hostage," because it was not a Meeting-wide decision. While the Meeting seemed to take his concerns quite seriously and held a serious discussion in April, 1989 on the relationship between the Meeting and "independent groups" within the Meeting, his concerns regarding process may have gone unasuaged. The next month, he informed Oversight that he was withdrawing his membership. The minutes relate the Meeting's response when his letter of withdrawal was read:

> "Members questioned whether every possibility to help [name] with clearness regarding this decision had been explored. It was reported that [name] stated he had been gaining clearness about this tep for a long time nad did not want to use the clearness procedure suggested by *Faith and Practice* for membership withdrawal. Individuals expressed concern that we all find ways of reaching out to [name] to better understand the issues and reasons underlying his withdrawal from long time membership. Several members expressed regret at [name's] decision."[50]

It seemed likely that this man left as a result of his disagreement with the direction Meeting was going on this issue, although informants also told me that he had been suffering from mental illness and that may have contributed both to his perceptions of a gay conspiracy and to his having to leave the Meeting. In any case, one person is certainly not a majority, and while the Meeting was apparently aware of a "number of persons who may be staying away from worship because of

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[49] Minutes from the June, 1992 Meeting for Business.

[50] Minutes from the May, 1989 Meeting for Business.

pain in our conflicts," there is no evidence that this was due to any abuse of process or that it pertained to more than a handful of people.

Even if almost everyone stuck it out and continued to participate, it is still possible that a majority was being pressured into going along with the decision through the systematic silencing of dissent. Dissent could conceivably be silenced in at least three ways: through formal procedural exclusion (discussed above), due to a lack of opportunities for the expression of opposing views, or because the atmosphere on such occasions was sufficiently punitive to discourage a majority of members from speaking up. In terms of opportunities for the expression of dissent, it is clear that UFM facilitated a wide range of such opportunities, using a variety of creative formats. One of the first such opportunities, outside of normal Meeting for Business, was when the Subcommittee on Committed Relationships (including members of Oversight, Worship & Ministry, and UFLGC) organized Worship Sharing groups on the Meeting's care of relationships. Worship Sharing is a Quaker practice of directed worship where Friends gather in the spirit of worship to consider a specific query or set of queries. It differs from normal Meeting for Worship only in that each person is expected to make their views known, rather than waiting to be 'moved by the Spirit." The process is not meant to produce a decision, nor are Friends supposed to respond to each other's leadings; it is designed to facilitate the sharing of views. Each group was given a set of queries written by the Subcommittee. All members and interested attenders were encouraged to participate. Ten groups, totalling over 100 participants, met in members' homes over a six-month period (from 6/86 to 12/86), with some groups deciding to meet weekly or bi-weekly. Afterwards, each group gave a report at Meeting for Business and submitted a written report to the Subcommittee, who reviewed them, along with other correspondence received from members, and drafted a "Statement on Care of Committed Same-sex Relationships."

Other examples abound. On several occasions, rather than pushing for a decision, various committees would present 'draft" minutes for 'seasoning," or 'statements of progress" would be offered, with the request that concerned Friends give feedback and recommendations to the committee or the Clerk. Outside Quaker facilitators were invited to hold individual or group 'listening sessions" for Friends who had concerns about the life of UFM, and the facilitators reported back to the Meeting. Two 'threshing sessions" were held, one specifically on this issue and one on 'stewardship" (described above). Threshing sessions are another unique Quaker

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practice in which no decision is sought, but a forum is made available for people to speak their minds and come to a better understanding of how others feel on a particular topic. The first half of the two-hour threshing session on same-sex relationships was specifically set aside to hear from those who had not yet spoken on this issue.

The atmosphere in the various threshing sessions, Meetings for Business, listening sessions, and Worship Sharing groups was sometimes contentious, but generally quite tolerant, and even encouraging of dissent. This is not to say that harsh words weren't exchanged or that every meeting was a love-in. Far from it. The point is that harsh words *were* exchanged, and dissent, harsh or not, *was* voiced repeatedly. Process watchers were initiated to make sure that all felt comfortable making their leadings known and reported back to the group when they saw undue pressure brought to bear on those with minority views. In the last few years, in fact, as the Meeting put more and more emphasis on proper process, the atmosphere became even less contentious. At the same time, there were two occasions when dissenters complained that they had been subjected to undue pressure, and in my opinion, were somewhat justified in their complaints, although by non-Quaker standards, the degree of pressure was relatively mild. Still, if a minority had truly bulldozed the decision, we would have expected that there would be widespread rumblings to that effect among the members who lived through it. In the year that I attended UFM, I did not hear any such rumblings. And when asked, all of the sixteen members I interviewed--including several who at one time opposed same-sex marriage--felt that when unity was reached, the minute reflected a true sense of the Meeting.

Concentration of resources

In most organizations, one indication of oligarchy is that a minority of powerful individuals owns and/or controls the organization's resources. In an organization involved in production, the distribution of those resources in the form of wages and benefits is the issue. Some religious organizations, like the Catholic Church, own a substantial amount of wealth, and those within the organization who have the power to decide how that wealth is distributed will likely have a large say in decisions the organization makes.

On the other hand, while Quakers are generally a wealthy group, the Meetings themselves may not own much property. UFM controls very little in the way of physical resources. It owns

the Meeting House and the property it sits on, the adjacent parking lot, and a house next door which houses the Meeting's service internship program and is sometimes used for meetings. Beyond that, there is a library, books and pamphlets which the Meeting sells, some office equipment, and lots of toys and kitchen supplies. In terms of fluid assets, the Meeting administers a scholarship fund and a fund to assist people with AIDS. The budget is managed by the Treasurer and the Finance Committee, and must be approved by the Meeting each year. Likewise, any expenditures in excess of the budget must go to the Meeting for approval. Wages for the five paid staff members (two caretakers, a janitor, the Office Coordinator, and an administrator for the internship program) are decided upon by the whole Meeting, and each position is supervised by a different committee, so no one committee controls the resources of wages and benefits. Moreover, as both Lipset et al (1956) and Rothschild-Whitt (1979) noted, if leaders don't receive much in the way of remuneration or social status, they won't be as tempted to use undemocratic means to maintain their positoins. Because none of the Clerks or committee members are paid positions, the "leadership" of the Meeting does not have any material incentive to stay "in power."

The Meeting house itself is probably the most valuable commodity controlled by the Meeting. There are two permanent tenants (the American Friends Service Committee and a non-profit day-care) and the other rooms in the two-story structure are sometimes rented out to local community groups for various events. The half-time Office Coordinator manages the schedule according to policies set by the Meeting. Groups within the Meeting are allowed to use the facilities rent-free, so long as they are sponsored by one of the Meeting's standing committees, but internal groups have no priority in scheduling. All scheduling is done on a first-come first-served basis. Consequently, the Office Coordinator doesn't wield much power through his control of the schedule.

Lastly, an oligarchy could also form around those with the ability to *contribute* resources. Other than rental income, the Meeting is primarily sustained by contributions from its members. I wanted to find out if those who contributed more to the Meeting were afforded more weight in decisions, so I asked the Office Coordinator how contributions were tracked. According to the Office Coordinator, only he and the Treasurer know how much anyone gives: the information is kept confidential. Of course, it could be that those who are considered "weighty" Friends could acquire that reputation in part through factors related to class privelege, such that those whose

opinions are most respected just happen to also be the wealthiest members, but I have no data on that. In any case, that would not be an oligarchy based on the control of *Meeting* resources. Given that the Meeting has so little in the way of resources to distribute, and since the control of Meeting resources is so decentralized and does not afford any incentive for gaining and holding power within the Meeting, it seems very unlikely that an oligarchy would emerge on that basis.

Leadership turnover

An entrenched leadership is one of the primary indicators of oligarchy in the iron law literature. Union officials who are never elected and serve life-terms, or a securely established cadre of civil service bureaucrats, or even incumbant Senators who are virtually impossible to dislodge from office due to the inequities of campaign finance policies--all are examples of oligarchies because the security of the office leads them to feel invulnerable and insulated from accountability to their members, clients, or constituents. When that happens, decisions get made that may better serve the interests of the leader than those of the rank and file.

As I noted above in the description of the officers and committee structure, there is not much of a 'leadership" in the formal sense at UFM. Officers and Committee Clerks serve two or three year terms and are appointed by the Meeting. While the term limits are carefully followed for the Clerk and Recording Clerk, the more specialized and/or difficult to fill positions like Treasurer and Statistical Clerk sometimes turn over less frequently. Still, in the twelve years from 1985 to 1997 for which I was able to find committee lists, the Clerk, Recording Clerk turned over at least every two years and sometimes every year. On the five potentially most powerful committees, Finance, Nominating, Oversight, Personnel, and Worship & Ministry, the turnover was similarly rapid--no one served as clerk of any of these committees for more than one term except for one person on Finance and one on Personnel. Even in the more specialized positions, the most anyone served was three terms (six years), and that may not have been consecutive. It is worth noting, however, that the turnover rate is not as high as it is because of term limits. It is my impression that the term limits are not really imposed as *limits*, except in the case of the high visibility leadership positions. Rather they are given as suggestions for how long people should be willing to contribute to the committee. In a 200-member Meeting that needs between 100 and 125 people to fill standing committee and officer positions at any given time, the struggle is more one

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of keeping the positions filled than of having to push people out when they get too comfortable! And of course, if any member felt that someone was abusing their position or had been in it too long, s/he could oppose the slate proposed by Nominating Committee.

Participation in Governance

At the beginning of this section, we explored the possibility that an oligarchy might have emerged in UFM's decision-making structure. At that point, we were asking what proportion *of those who were involved in the decision-making* actually opposed the cluster of decisions having to do with same-sex marriage. An even harsher test is to look at what proportion *of the whole membership* participates in the governance of the Meeting. If only a small proportion of an organization's membership is actually involved, then one could argue that that proportion represents an oligarchy, even if that group makes decisions by consensus. Most of the literature does not have this strong a standard. Lipset, Trow, and Coleman (1956), for example, defend a two-party system of elected representatives as being a democracy. I have argued, however, that the Quaker model under consideration in this study generally conforms to what Rothschild-Whitt (1979) calls the collectivist-democratic organizational form--a form which emphasizes and relies on high levels of participation in order to achieve the ideal of participatory democracy. For that reason, I wanted to see how UFM measured up to this standard.

During this time, there were approximately 200 official members listed in the UFM directory. According to several of my informants, close to a quarter of these were not in a position to participate, either because they lived elsewhere and just kept the official affiliation to UFM, or because they were elderly and seldom came to the Meeting house due to limited physical mobility. Therefore, the pool of potentially participants numbered somewhere around 150 during this period. Attendance figures were not always available in the minutes, but the following table lists the number in attendance and the corresponding percentage of potentially active members who participated in selected events while the same-sex marriage issue was being considered:

Attendance at UFM Events

Date(s)	No.	%	Event
• 6/86 - 12/86	100+	67%	Worship Sharing Groups
• 6/87	50	33%	Workshop on 'Finding Unity in Diversity" (outside

			facilitator
• 11/88	60+	40%	Meeting for Business, membership request of gay man
• 1/89	90	60%	Threshing Session on the Care of Relationships
• 5/89	25	17%	Threshing Session on Stewardship
• 1/90	68	45%	Signed up for Spiritual Enrichment Study Groups
• 4/92	60	40%	5-hour Meeting for Unity

The table clearly shows a consistently high level of participation, with the exception of the Threshing Session on Stewardship on May 21, 1989. Speculating, I would say that the low turnout for that event had more to do with the fact that they were going to be talking about how to increase members' contributions to the Meeting (a subject sure to scare people away) and perhaps the close proximity to Memorial Day weekend. Excluding that meeting as an exceptional case, then, participation averaged 48% for each event--an incredibly high rate for organizations of that size. In interpreting these figures, we might compare them to the standard set forth in Gouldner's *Studies in Leadership: Leadership and Democratic Action* (1965), who considered an active participation rate of 5-7% as oligarchical.[51]

If we look at participation in terms of leadership and participation in the committee structure, the picture is even more impressive. Committee and officer lists were only available for the years 1985-1997, but that twelve year period overlaps significantly with the period under study and membership has remained around 200 since 1981, so we can probably assume that the levels would be comparable to the 1981-1992 period. From 1985 to 1997, 134 different people held some kind of leadership position--serving either as one of the four officers, as one of the eight representatives to other organizations, or as clerk of one of the standing committees. That means that over a twelve year period, over 90% of the membership served in a leadership capacity at some time. In terms of concentration, the top 5%--the seven people who held the highest

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[51] Gouldner, Alvin Ward. 1965. *Studies in Leadership: Leadership and Democratic Action*. New York: Russell & Russell.

number of positions over the twelve-year period--occupied only 20% of the 359 one-year slots.[52] Moreover, at any given time, the Meeting's committee and officer structure *requires* the participation of between 67-83% of its members (100-125 people) just for normal operations. Given these numbers, UFM clearly shatters Michels' dire conclusion that a participatory democracy is structurally impossible.

In summary, the evidence strongly suggests that governing power was not concentrated in the hands of a minority during the period when UFM was struggling with the issue of same-sex marriages. While it is conceivable that a handful of members felt pressured into going along with the decision, and at times the process was less than perfect by Quaker standards, a wide range of opportunities for dissent were offered, and herculean efforts were made to create an inclusive, accepting atmosphere. Leadership turnover and participation levels were uncommonly high when held up to Michels' predictions of professional consolidation. The amount of financial and physical resources available for members' use is minimal, policy decisions regarding their allocation and use are made collectively, and supervision of the paid staff is decentralized so that no one committee has concentrated authority over the daily operations of the facilities. The question yet to be answered is how--in a society and culture which encourages competition, cultivates hierarchy, justifies inequality, subordinates the communitarian spirit to individualism, and holds up majority rule democracy as the political ideal--how can such a community sustain itself?

Conditions for Maintaining a Participatory Community

If we have found a case where an organization has been able to resist the development of an oligarchy, we have yet to explain how it manages such an unlikely feat. A few scholars have attempted to defend the possibility for democracy under certain conditions. Lipset, Trow, and Coleman (1956) found democracy in the structure of the International Typographical Union, for example, but they did so by modifying their definition of democracy to match the American model of political "democracy" and claimed that a two-party system was a necessary and sufficient

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[52] I used the least common denominator of one-year slots instead of full terms for the sake of convenience.

safeguard against oligarchy. Likewise, Rothschild-Whitt's work points out the existence of collectivist-democratic collectives, but their size, their structural position in society, as well as their secular goals and decision-making process make for a less than perfect comparison. In other words, the conditions for democracy (however defined) suggested by these studies offer some help in analyzing this case, but leave many questions unanswered. UFM is a very different kind of organization. The idea of an organization of this size (150 local members) operating effectively using a consensus-style decision-making process and maintaining such a high level of participation is so inconceivable in the literature that we don't even have a name for it, much less a good explanation for its viability. In fact, many Quakers *object* to the term "democracy" to characterize their system. It is true that democracy connotes equal political power, or at least equal political rights (as in one person, one vote), but it also implies "voting" and a system of majority rule. Again, Quakerism's roots in a pre-Enlightenment religious ideology is of crucial importance, as one of Sheeran's interviewees explains:

> "Some Friends seem to see democracy as the hallmark of Friends decision making. They hold for the 'one-man-one-vote' principle. Their use of 'democracy' is a substitution of equal political power for the Quaker fundamental insight that God can speak in anyone. It's easy to fall into this trap. After all, democracy is an 'in' word. Surely we don't want people to think of us as 'antidemocratic'! But the person who sees our method as 'pure democracy' has missed its root principle. At root, we are involved in an exercise of obedience, of denial of self-will, of seeking truth in contradistinction to our own personal or group interest."[53]

What is the name for a system in which *no one* rules? or *everyone* rules? We could call it anarchist, and it is true that the Quaker system conforms to the organizational structure of self-governance prescribed by collectivist- or communist-anarchism, but in general the term has too many theoretical variants, some of which do not apply at all in this case. For lack of a more accurate designation, I have been using Rothschild-Whitt's term "collectivist-democracy," or "participatory community," though neither adequately expresses the unique combination of being both participatory and direct, but at the same time *not* based on voting or the principle of majority

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[53] Sheeran, op. cit. p.80

rule. In any case, the point is that while we are not starting *completely* from scratch, this kind of system is seriously undertheorized, primarily because it is not thought to be possible.

Because this is a single-case study, I can only speculate as to which features of this organization and/or its environment might be responsible for its vitality. Bearing in mind that with this design one cannot "control" for any hypothesized "independent variables," I will discuss what I think are the most important conditions contributing to the success of this form and hope that strategically selected comparative studies will eventually ascertain the validity of my speculations.

External factors

There are several factors having to do with the external environment in which UFM operates which reduce the pressures most organizations feel to adopt hierarchical, bureaucratic structures, and thereby succumb to oligarchic tendencies. The lack of a strong, centralized external threat, the lack of market-based competition, and the fact that the Society of Friends represents an ideological "niche" which attracts members with the "right" kind of demographic characteristics and motivations all seem to be important factors.

In his summary of the historical development of the Society of Friends, Sheeran makes an intriguing observation. Drawing on the Contingency Theory of organizations put forth by Lawrence and Lorsch (1967), Sheeran notes that the development of Quaker structure in England was directed in part by its need to respond effectively to external persecution.[54] Contingency Theory posits that regardless of the intent or ideological commitment of those managing an organization, the interplay between the organization and relevant features of its external environment plays a determining role in the long-term development of the organization. Lawrence and Lorsch differentiated between type "T" organizations (characterized by independent members, responsive leaders, high local autonomy, a relative lack of hierarchy, and committee-based decision-making) and type "L" organizations (responsive members, autocratic leaders, centralized hierarchical structure, and decisions made at the top and passed down). "L" groups

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[54] Paul R. Lawrence and Jay W. Lorsch, 1967. *Organization and Environment,* Boston: Harvard University Press.

are supposed to be most effective when there is some kind of external threat, while 'T" groups are more able to adapt to rapid environmental change.

In England, where the religion was founded, Quakers started out as a 'T" type organization and gradually, between 1676 and 1736, took on more of an 'L" type structure. In the United States, however, Friends have been able to maintain the 'T" type structure. Sheeran hypothesized that the development in England (he did not address American Friends) was related to the changing nature of the persecution Quakers faced. At first this persecution was spasmodic, localized, and unsystematic, and the 'T" structure allowed Quakers to resist and adapt to the external threat quite effectively. However, as the persecution itself became more systematic and institutionalized at the national level, Friends adapted by creating the Meeting for Sufferings--a national level representative structure which lobbied Parliament on behalf of Friends' interests. In short, as persecution became more centralized, the organizational structure of the Society became more centralized in order to ward off the external threat more effectively. In the United States, on the other hand, while Quakers were severely persecuted (especially at the hands of the Puritans), the separation of Church and State kept that persecution from gaining official weight and sanction. The external threat never became centralized. This may be a critical historical factor in the maintenance of local autonomy and non-hierarchical governance among American Friends.

Similarly, the fact that Friends Meetings are somewhat removed from the capitalist production process means that they do not face the same imperatives of market competition that profit-driven organizations face. Because they do not produce a 'product" for sale on the market, and because they do not rely on profit for their existence, they do not face the same pressures of technical efficiency which Michels' claimed made bureaucracy necessary. It would be far more difficult (even given Rothschild's findings) for a business organization to successfully adopt this structure. With the exception of certain small-scale collectives offering highly specialized professional services, a business in which *any* worker on the shop floor could stand in the way of a management decision--in which all policy decisions governing production, pricing, hiring, and working conditions required that the entire organization come to unity--simply could not survive within a capitalist system, because it would not be able to compete with the greater technical efficiency of its bureaucratically structured competitors. If Quakers can be said to offer a product, it is a particular kind of spiritual community. In that sense, one could say they have a niche in the

religious "market" of competing churches--they must compete for members in order to maintain their financial base. Perhaps a spiritual community is a certain kind of "highly specialized professional service"? But as Sheeran and Morley have both argued, the "sacrement" of that spiritual community is the experience of the "gathered Meeting," and the gathered Meeting in turn is a product of the egalitarian, participatory, decentralized structure of "Quaker process." Paradoxically, the very characteristics which theoretically make the Quaker structure so unlikely to exist actually help to *ensure* its survival by making it an attractive alternative to other kinds of religious organizations (at least to some).

Quakers may also occupy an ideological niche, based on its social testimonies on peace and social and economic justice, which attracts a certain kind of homogeneous membership. Lipset et al and Rothschild-Whitt both list homogeneity of interests as a precondition for democracy, and this certainly holds true in the case of Quakerism. Over the past three and a half centuries, Friends have been very active in the peace, environmental, women's rights, prisoners' rights, civil rights, anti-death penalty, communist, and abolitionist movements. This social movement orientation (also listed as a condition for democracy in organizations by Rothschild-Whitt) has attracted a constituency with many of the same demographic characteristics as scholars have found in the New Social Movements. Quakers (at least in Western Europe and the United States) are predominantly middle or upper middle class, highly educated, white, politically progressive, and work in the professional or social service sectors of the economy. It is difficult to say whether it is the characteristic substance of this niche or the mere fact of homogeneity which plays the more important role in facilitating adherence to Quaker process, but it is likely that both factors are important.

Internal factors

I began this paper by arguing that it is the non-bureaucratic structure which allows Quakers to resist oligarchy. While I have outlined several aspects of the structure which serve as checks against the concentration and abuse of power, it is also clear that Quaker culture plays an important role in sustaining that structure. Historical records suggest that George Fox created the structure out of commitment to certain religious beliefs, and they remain an important means of justification for its continued use. At the same time, Quaker religious ideology arose in the

context of Cromwell's Revolution and the rise to power of the English bourgeoisie, so its substance was undoubtedly shaped by those conditions initially. Once established, the ideology and culture serve to reproduce the social relations of power *within* the organization.

We have also seen that secular groups using consensus-based decision-making tend to devolve into self-interested competition and compromise. It may be, as Morley and many of my informants have maintained, that the beliefs in continuing revelation and 'that of God in everyone" are critical components for making Quaker process work. It is clear, at least, that some kind of deeply held, integrated system of beliefs must be present. Stripped of its religious content, Quaker process works because they believe axiomatically that each person's contribution *always* contains something of value and truth, because they have faith in the group's ability to arrive at a solution that goes beyond compromise, because they care about each other and feel a responsibility for the maintenance of the community, and because they believe that the means they use must be consistent with the ends they seek. Lastly, it works because it *has* worked. That is, because when the process works, it generates a mystically charged experience that many describe as "addictive" and "sacramental." It is possible that secular groups of the same size could learn to use this structure effectively, but to do so, they would have to do more than simply ape the mechanics. They would need an integrated ideology that contained at least some of these elements. Beyond the shared belief system, cultural factors such as shared language and customs help to generate a strong Quaker identity which protects it somewhat from the incursions of the dominant culture.

One last internal condition which I would like to highlight has to do with the goals of the organization. It's not just that Quakers care more about the nature of the process than the outcome of any particular decision. That's true in some respects, but it is also misleading. The truth is that Quaker process works best when the members care more about the goal of building a strong community than about how quickly they make decisions. While it manifests itself as a preference for process over product, what underlies that manifestation is a preference for one *kind* of product over another; *a preference for social efficiency over technical efficiency.* When reading through the minutes and looking over the timeline of events in the history of the same-sex marriage issue at UFM, one thing struck me as especially remarkable. After laboring over this issue for ten years and continuing to run into brick wall after brick wall, it was only when they

refocused their attention on trying to heal the wounds in their community and let go of trying to reach unity that the decision finally came. The ultimate reward at the end of the struggle was not that they had made a good decision (though they felt they had). The outcome referred to again and again in my interviews was that the community was stronger, closer, more supportive than it had ever been. As one member wrote in her retelling of the story:

> 'The Meeting, after an eleven year struggle, had found unity. More than that, we had found a much deeper sense of the Spirit. Our community was stronger because of our struggle. We knew as well that the Spirit was among us as it might never have been had we not wrestled with this issue. There are probably some persons who are less loyal to the Meeting because of this long struggle, but for the most part the people who lived it through and remained loyal almost miss the sense of involvement and deep need for the Spirit which grew among us while the issue continued unresolved. We know we came to know each other better in that which is eternal."[55]

Rothschild-Whitt lists *time* as one of the social costs of adopting a collectivist-democratic structure. Likewise, most observers and even Quakers themselves acknowledge that one of the major disadvantages of this process is that it is slow and technically inefficient. If a group wants to 'get a lot done" (read: make lots of major decisions quickly), this structure absolutely is not the way to go. But if the goals of the organization include being *socially efficient* (i.e. creating a tight-knit, socially empowered, egalitarian community), this structure is perhaps the *most* efficient means of accomplishing that end. When I asked about the Meeting's role in their lives., my informants repeated referred to UFM as 'my family," 'my spiritual home," 'my faith community," or 'a place where I belong and feel cared for." If the goal is to create a just and caring community, making a lot of decisions quickly in a way that allows for individual needs to be disregarded is *counter*productive. Given the payoff, the additional time it takes may not be a net cost at all. When I asked one dedicated UFM member why, with all the apparent drawbacks and difficulties involved, he still preferred the Quaker process of sense of the Meeting over majority rule, he responded:

> 'I don't want to belong to an organization that doesn't take what's important to me into account. I don't want to belong to an organization where I can be voted down.

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[55] Brown, Judy. 1995. Draft of 'One Meeting's Adventure with Lesbian and Gay Issues" submitted to *Friends' Journal.*

I'm a minority in so many ways. I'm a religious minority, a sexual minority, an ethnic minority...I don't want to belong to an organization where my rights, my personhood, my participation in the organization only count if a majority agrees with me. It is important to me to be able to stand up and say 'I have a concern about that,' and other people will listen. And it is also important to me to have those moments when there's been tussling and dissention and we do reach a unity, and you realize the Spirit's moving among you. It's a joyous, mystical experience! Why would I want to take that out of my life? Why just go for 51%?"

Obviously for this man, there is a net benefit, rather than a net cost to the process, even with the difficulties and limitations. Perhaps we should ask ourselves the reverse question. Is the gain of technical efficiency worth the opportunity cost of social equality and self-actualization within one's community? It appears that in a society which requires technical efficiency, social efficiency will likely be unattainable, regardless of the promises of elected officials or the good intentions of social movement leaders. The two goals seem largely incompatible.

Implications for Democratic Theory: the Functions of Participation in Egalitarian Structures

In *Participation and Democratic Theory*, Carole Pateman delineates and the theoretical tradition which defines democracy in terms of participation. Tracing the lineage from Rousseau through J. S. Mill to G.D.H. Cole, she maintains that the representative and participatory strands of democratic theory cannot be collapsed into one category of "classical theory." Originally, democracy was *defined* as the rule of the people by means of the maximum participation of all the people. That definition has come to be regarded as a normative prescription (utopian) rather than a theory and a dangerous one at that, because of the supposed instability of any system that affords meaningful participation to everyone. In revisiting the work of key participatory theorists, Pateman finds that it wasn't just a normative prescription, but that they in fact laid out a series of necesary conditions and institutional features which would be required if a participatory system was to work.

Pateman lists three positive functions of participation in the decision-making of groups, all of which were in evidence in this study. First, according to Pateman's reading of the participatory strand of democratic theory, participation functions to build commitment to the decisions that are made. Implementation goes much more smoothly, decisions are not often revisited again and again by competing factions who won't give up and keep trying to overturn what has already been

decided, and enforcement is less of a problem when everyone affected by a decision has had a meaningful say in determining what was decided.

The second function function of participation is that it has an integrative effect. It makes people feel a sense of ownership and obligation to the community. In other words, far from being a dangerous threat to the stability of the system, meaningful participation creates and then sustains a participatory democratic political system. It is stable *because* of the psychological impact participation has on the individual, developing the capacity to think of the collective interest, to cooperate and act jointly with others, to be public minded instead of competing with others over private interests, etc. The structure encourages participation, which in turn keeps the structure healthy. This was certainly the case at UFM, although it is not, as discussed above, an automatic outcome of a purely mechanical process. Rather, stability depends on both structural and cultural factors, as well as the convergence of certain external factors.

Lastly, the primary function of participation is educative. It is through participation in the democratic structures of local associations that citizens learn the necessary skills and gain the sense of empowerment for democratic participation at the national level. Consequently, the crucial factor in making participatory democracy work at the national level is the authority structures of non-governmental spheres of society. Participation is the means by which we are socialized into the power relations of society; we learn to accept and function within them by *practicing* it in our daily lives. Therefore, paricipation in hierarchical structures teaches us how to live in a hierarchical society and to except and internalize its seeming inevitability. In contrast, participation in collectivist-democratic structures like the one described in this study, may effectively teach us how it might be possible to live in a society without hierarchy--one in which each person's voice and needs count and cannot be overruled--even by a majority. At least under certain circumstances and on a limited scale, it appears that Michels' was mistaken about the prospects for social and political equality.

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