

Front Line



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some members of a group then it is available to all members of that group and it is impossible to prevent any group members from enjoying it. Thus if an interest group is successful in its negotiations with government on behalf of its members the fruits, the collective goods, benefit all eligible members of the group whether they are actual members of the group or not. Because a public good can be enjoyed by all, regardless of prior participation, individuals are tempted to withhold contributing and 'free ride' in the expectation that others will exert themselves on their behalf.

from non-members, thus providing a particular gain to offset the cost of belonging or by being able to coerce prospective members to join, perhaps by the operation of a closed shop.

Olson's model may be summarised as follows: 1) individuals who choose between several actions will choose the action for which the consequences have the highest value for the individual; 2) a benefit has a higher value than a cost; 3) any person will choose a benefit rather than a cost; 4) in joining an association an individual expends a certain cost; 5) an individual will benefit equally from the collective good supplied by the association of which the individual is an eligible member regardless of whether the individual is a member or not; 6) therefore an individual will not join an association merely to obtain its collective good, but rather to obtain selective incentives only available to members of the association; 7) therefore if an association is to obtain and retain members it must offer positive (services) or negative (coercion) selective incentives that exceed the cost of membership.

Why do individuals join interest groups, political parties, or even voluntary professional associations like ALIA? This question has been the subject of much theorising by political scientists and sociologists. In the mid-60s Mancur Olson provided a forceful and influential formulation of this matter in his book *The Logic of Collective Action* in which he drew on the theory of public or collective goods elaborated by a long line of economists from David Hume to Paul Samuelson.

The nature of a public good is that it is 'non-excludable' and that its consumption does not diminish the available stock. This means that if a public good is provided for

interest groups stimulate rational individuals to act in a group orientated way

According to Olson, interest groups stimulate rational individuals to act in a group orientated way, by offering a 'separate' and 'selective' incentive. Selective incentives, unlike public goods, are benefits that can be effectively withheld

In the case of voluntary professional associations financial selective incentives mainly take the form of discounts on association products and services, discounts on retail market products, a journal, and most effectively for many associations, restrictive licensing. Financial

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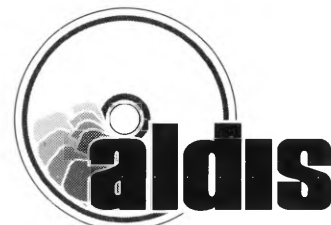
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incentives are not the only incentives—there may be social incentives for the individual to make such a contribution. Though the individual may gain financially by not joining an association and free riding, the social loss may outweigh the economic gain. Colleagues may exert 'social pressure' to encourage individuals to do their part towards achieving the group goal. Moreover, everyday observation reveals that most people value the fellowship of their friends and associates, social status, personal prestige, and self-esteem. The existence of these social incentives are regarded by Olson as individual non-collective goods and social sanctions and social rewards are 'selective incentives'.

Last year, with the approval of the General Council, I surveyed 645 current members and 364 recently lapsed members in order to shed some light on the following questions relating to Olson's theory:

1. Why do individuals join voluntary professional associations? Do they join to underwrite the provision of collective goods or in order to gain selective incentives?

2. Do non-members employ a strategy of free riding?

The evidence provided by the analysis of the data obtained from the responses to the members survey clearly indicates that ALIA members joined the Association in order to obtain selective incentives rather than merely to obtain the collective goods.

This is particularly evident from the responses to the question in the members survey in which participants were asked why they joined the Association. Only 3.4 per cent of the responses do not mention obtaining some category of selective incentive as a reason for joining. Selective incentives in the form of either direct services or social benefits account for 85 per cent of the reasons given for joining; 9 per cent of the reasons were negative selective incentives (coercion) brought about by the now discontinued requirements of the Registration Certificate and subtle social pressure from a number of sources including colleagues, teachers, and more senior members of the profession.

Non-financial selective incentives provide the majority of reasons for joining among which reasons concerning social sanctions and social rewards are significant. The fact that a large proportion of the participants (almost 40 per cent) indicated that they did not avail themselves of any Association services or entitlements supports the view that non-financial considerations are generally perceived to be more important than selective financial incentives in decisions to join or to retain membership. Moreover, 96 per cent of responses indicated the individual recouped less than half or none of the membership fee from financial selective incentives.

No evidence has emerged from this

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study to indicate that any members merely joined in order to underwrite the provision of the collective goods generated by Association activities.

The analysis of the corresponding questions put to non-members in terms of why membership was discontinued revealed similar rational self-interested behaviour. However, in the case of non-members the selective incentives have not influenced these individuals to retain their membership. The evidence strongly suggests that non-members do not value selective incentives highly enough to justify the expenditure of the membership fee. However, there is no evidence that non-members (with perhaps the exception of those few non-members who indicated that their employing body is an institutional member) deliberately discontinue their membership in order to 'free ride'. It is doubtful, therefore, that individuals include considerations of collective goods in their calculations when deciding to discontinue their membership.

Open house for the conference Canberra's special libraries welcome the delegates

• National Library of Australia

Among these welcoming libraries is the NLA — a whole collection of special libraries under one roof. For example, the Asian collection is one of the specialties. Readers range from those wanting statistics of agricultural production, to stage or film directors, translators wanting to use obscure dictionaries, enthusiasts for Japanese swords or Chinese water-colour paintings. Government departments, lawyers, academics, writers and students are also included in its users plus the general public and casual readers. Language specialists help readers use materials in other languages.

The NLA has given particular priority to collecting Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Korean and Indonesian materials. It also has good collections on the other countries of South and Southeast Asia. Almost half a million volumes in Asian languages

are held in the library and last year about \$700 000 was spent on acquisitions from Asia.

• The Commonwealth Parliamentary Library

This is probably the largest special library in the country, with a staff of nearly 200 and an annual budget of over \$11 million.

Its primary mission is to service the information needs of the Senators and Members and their staff, assisting them in debate, policy formulation, committee work, media releases and interviews, constituency work and in keeping abreast of issues and opinion. The Parliamentary Library also offers, through the Parliamentary Research Service (PRS), advice on policy options and on current and future issues.

Of particular interest is the Media Information, Current Awareness and Hansard (MICAHA) service, which monitors the print and electronic

media and builds elaborate resources which are used to respond to requests for information from the media.

There is strong subject specialisation in the Information Services area and in the PRS. In Information Services, there are one or two librarians in each major subject area. As well as handling most enquiries in their respective subject areas, the specialist librarians also have responsibilities in collection development.

The library maintains a database of journal articles, transcripts of radio and television programs, and other types of material, which is available online throughout Parliament House. A key feature of this system, the Information Storage and Retrieval (ISR) system, is its highly integrated use of the Parliamentary Library Thesaurus, also developed in-house.

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