The study applies to the strategic choices and aims of the Agrarian Union/Centre Party between years 1964-2001. In particular, the study examines the strategies of the Centre Party to defend its position in the Finnish politics amidst an ungovernable structural change of the society and a period of political transition. The aim is to analyze the strategic choices of the Party and their origin, basically from the point of view of the Party leadership. A strategic choice of a party is composed of a political-ideological core, which is supported by several activities. The study aims also to analyze the internal reforms of the Centre party by comparing them to party theories Duverger, Kirchheimer, Panebianco, Katz & Mair. Also the role of the leaders of the Centre Party in generating the strategies has been examined.

The study is a qualitative one by nature. The method used in the study can be compared to "observing participation". The study contains also components of the grounded theory, due to a wide and many-sided material and the background of the author. The strategies are approached with a chronological disposition by analyzing them in the light of questions that are based on party theories.

The background for the increased election support is the development towards a catch-all party that was accelerated by the change of the name of the Party in 1965 (from the Agrarian Union to the Centre Party). In 2001, the proportional support of the Party was at the same level as in 1962 (23-24 %). The development towards a catch-all party - a long-term strategic choice - was strengthened in 1962-1999 when also the support of the Party increased tenfold in the cities and the share of the Party of votes that were cast in the cities increased fivefold. In 2000, approximately 90 per cent of the supporters were others than farmers, whereas in the beginning of 1960s the situation was the opposite.

The main conclusion is that, although the Centre Party has to a large extent become a catch-all party, consistent with the party theories, it has always contained strategic elements of difference and originality, arising from the core identity of the Party. The Party leadership has not only developed strategies based on the concept of a catch-all party, but also utilized the originality of the party both in the political-ideological and the organizational work.

The strategy to reform the Agrarian Union as a Centre Party (1964-1970) pushed the Party to become a catch-all party. The catastrophe in the 1970 general election drove the Party to re-establish its identity in the 1970s. As a result of this process, the Party changed from a class party to a catch-all party of the regions. After these strategies that were implemented under the leadership of Dr Johannes Virolainen, the Party chose in the 1980s, under the leadership of Mr Paavo Väyrynen, a strategy of a high profile. This strategy, with which the Party challenged the leading position of the social-democrats, transformed the Party into an ideologically conscious party of masses.

After the 1991 general election the Centre Party became the leading governmental party. Under the leadership of Mr Esko Aho (Prime Minister 1991-95) the Party pursued the politics of necessity, characteristic of a governmental party. It also adapted characters of an election party that had amended its ideology more pragmatic.

The opposition strategy of the late 1990s, characterised by the "labour reform", strengthened the Party as a party of different projects with the aim to gain electoral support.

The Agrarian Union was in 1964 in a turning point, the Centre Party was in a same kind of situation in 2001. The only thing that had remained of the components of the previous pivotal position, was the support.

The basic source material of the study are the minutes (including the annexes) from all official meetings of all party organs from 1964 to 2001. Also the archives of Dr Urho Kekkonen, Dr Johannes Virolainen and Dr Ahti Karjalainen as well as material produced by the Party Headquarters have been used. Several contemporaries have been interviewed.

Avainsanat-Nyckelord-Keywods
political history - parties - Finland - 1964-2001
strategy - Centre Party - Finland - 1964-2001
catch-all party
core identity
pivotal position

Säilytyspaikka-Förvaringsställe-Where deposited
Muita tietoja-Övriga uppgifter-Additional information