STRATHCLYDE PAPERS ON GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

GOVERNMENT AND GROUPS IN BRITAIN:

Changing Styles

by

J J Richardson

No. 69 *1990*

Department of Government, McCance Building, 16 Richmond Street, Glasgow G1 1XQ

STRATHCLYDE PAPERS ON GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

(Series Editor David Judge)

No. 69

GOVERNMENT AND GROUPS IN BRITAIN: CHANGING STYLES

By

J. J. Richardson
(University of Strathclyde)

ISSN 0264-1496

Department of Government
University ofStrathclyde
GLASGOW G1 1XQ
Scotland U.K.

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that pressure groups were not 'discovered' by academic observers until the mid-1950s, Britain has a very long history of a well developed interest group system. As S. E. Finer noted in his pioneering *Anonymous Empire*, first published in 1958, it is impossible to say how many groups there are in Britain. However, referring specifically to the fields of industry and labour he commented that the figures "....show that Britain is more 'organised' even than the USA, for long thought to be the home of 'joiners' ".[1] Even with what might be considered new issues – such as green politics, Britain in fact has long displayed a degree of group organisation, and integration in policy-making, more usually associated with post-industrial societies. Thus, as Lowe and Goyder point out, it was the Victorians who formed "... the first nature conservation group, the first building preservation group, the first outdoor pursuit group".[2] Ashby and Anderson [3] cite the example of one of the earliest pressure groups against air pollution – the Manchester Association for the Preservation of Smoke – being formed in 1843. National Environmental groups which are now highly integrated into both policy-making and implementing at national and local level, originated well before the Second World War. For example the National Smoke Abatement Society (now the National Society for Clean Air) was formed in 1929, and the Council for the Protection of Rural England was formed in 1926.

Patricia Hollis also reminds us that the Victorians had their equivalents of today's well known sectional groups, like the British Medical Association (BMA), and cause or promotional groups like the Campaign for

Nuclear Disarmament (CND), in their groups like the ship-owners lobby, the railway or West Indian interests on the one hand, and groups like the Lords Day Observance Society (still very active) and the Health of Towns Association on the other.[4] She notes, too, that the image and respectability – legitimacy in our terms – has changed over time. Thus, she writes "I suspect we regard the crusade as morally more legitimate than the lobby. For the Victorians, the reverse would have been true; just because the lobby was protective of its economic interest, just because it was rooted in property, it could claim to be consulted within the political community. The status of the crusading group, however, remained morally ambiguous though politically more and more powerful".[5] Interestingly, the definition of 'insider status'[6] was then *parliamentary* access. Thus

> How did pressure from without operate? Its first step was usually to seek direct parliamentary power, to persuade from within. The anti-slavery committee, headed by Thomas Fowell Buxton, had its own parliamentary voice, as of course did the philosophical radicals. Others, like Atwood, Urquhart, Miall and Bains, became members (of parliament) as a way of bringing pressure from without within...[7]

The Victorian period also saw what we now see as a recent phenomenon – namely, that existing party structures found difficulty accommodating new societal cleavages. Hollis, again – "But although parties came to carry more and more 'causes', nonetheless there were wide tracts of social policy, such as intervention in public health, factories and mines, in which party divisions did not operate". Finally, it is useful to note Hollis's identification of *pluralism* in Victorian politics:

> Forty years before, the existence of such pressure was illegitimate, unnecessary or both; now it was a necessary tool

> of social reform, a necessary aid to government, evidence of healthy public concern. Pressure from without had both stretched the arena of government and access to government, and in the process had thrown up feminist groups on the rights of prostitutes, evangelicals on the wrongs of prostitutes, public health on the diseases of prostitutes, Shaftsbury and Gladstone on refuges for prostitutes, and sabbatarians for no prostitution on Sundays. Victorian political life was engagingly pluralist.[8]

We dwell on the history of both sectional and promotional groups in Britain because of the need to appreciate the fact that the political process has had a very long time to develop standardised procedures for 'managing' group activity and because society has long accepted group influence as normal and indeed desirable. Moreover, this long history of group "accommodation" may well have had important economic consequences, as well as political effects. Mancur Olson has argued that what he terms 'distributional coalitions' have effects on the nature of decisions, as well as on the decision-making process. In a key passage on Britain he claims that

> Britain has precisely the powerful network of specialised interest organisations that.the argument developed here would lead us to expect in a country with its record of security and military stability.... In short, with age British society has acquired so many strong organisations and collusions that it suffers from an institutional sclerosis that slows its adaption to changing circumstances and changing technologies. [9]

Beer [10] has also pointed to the dangers of 'pluralistic stagnation' resulting from the cumulative effect of the defence of 'a quiescent *status quo'*, as has Samuel Brittan, in discussing the effect of particularistic demands by pressure groups. He argues that:

> Much of what purports to be criticism of the conduct of public service is really a cry by particular interest groups for more distribution towards themselves, enhanced and rationalised by an excessive expectation of what governments can do to boost their nation's economy so that other identifiable groups do not have to be asked too obviously to pay the cost. [11]

Without necessarily accepting the full force of arguments put forward by Olson (for example Sweden has an equally strong and stable interest group system yet has not suffered the economic decline seen in Britain), there is a strong case to be made that the practical form of interest group accommodation in Britain has generally worked against policy change and has contributed to the development of reform deficits in many policy areas. The 'pressure group game' is universal in western democracies - and is very evident in even allegedly *dirigiste* systems [13] – but it can be argued that the traditional British rules of the game, as embodied in institutions and well established processes and cultural values, have placed an especially high value on group influence.

2. POLICY-MAKING STRUCTURES, PROCESSES AND STYLES

Elsewhere, we have argued that the key features of the British policy process are a post-parliamentary (rather than post-industrial) system; a declining influence of parties and party ideology; and, centrally, strong links between groups and government departments. Decisions are reached in the context of

> strong boundaries between subject matters and indistinct, merged relationships between departments and relevant groups within individual policy areas. There is a breaking down of conceptual distinctions between government, agencies and

> pressure groups; on interpenetration of department and client group, an osmosis in personnel terms with ex-civil servants appearing in groups. In structural terms the policy-process is sectorised and segmented, following departmental and divisional lines, with proliferation of 'policy communities'. With the passage of time, there has been a tendency for the number of groups in each policy community to increase and for more cross-community and cross-sectoral links to develop.[13]

As the universe of groups has expanded, both by the emergence of new issues (such as embryo research) and the mobilisation of new interests around old issues (e.g. transport), the process of managing policy change has become more difficult. Essentially the old game – of bargaining and consensus seeking in order to produce agreed policy change and implementation – has now to accommodate far more players who appear to demand more by way of identifiable outcomes.

The 'process of consultation' is where policy change is hammered out, but the term can have a variety of meanings – ranging from what might be called 'sham consultation' to actual negotiations. Increasingly, large numbers of groups can be involved in these consultation exercises, within which certain key groups really matter. For example, several hundred groups were involved in discussions relating to the reform of the engineering profession in the 1970s but the *real* decision-making process finally centered on less than half a dozen key groups, whose co-operation was thought to be essential to implementation.[14] Similarly, it is almost inconceivable that all of the 620 groups in the consultation list maintained by the Vehicle Safety Division of the Department of Transport (in 1980) were forces to be reckoned with or could mobilise effective sanctions against the Department. Large numbers of groups in consultation exercise at least demonstrate some form of rather easy group *access* if not

influence.[15] The relative openness of the system and the willingness to consult (first noted by S.E. Finer as a basis for his objection to the term 'pressure group', as he felt that groups were often pressing against an open door[16]) is captured perfectly in the following quotation from a civil servant working in the field of food standards:

> Possible changes are widely canvassed, thoroughly discussed, considered in detail and, if broadly accepted to all who show an interest, put into effect. If implications of possible changes are missed, the policy-makers can point out that they consulted fully at the formative stage. *This continuous process of consultation tends to commit the whole policy community not only to the policy process, but also the decisions it brings forth*...[our emphasis]... the interest in food standards is confined to relativley small parts of certain central government departments and of local authorities and to 26 or 30 interest groups, and even within that group the degree of practical interest shown varies from subject to subject. Not only do almost all members of the policy community *have a clear interest in the smooth functioning of the system* [our emphasis], but in this mature policy system most of the potential repercussions of any policy shifts are foreseen and taken into account in advance of any statement of policy.[17]

This phenomenon – essentially the *professionalisation* of policy-making in which groups are generally regarded by decision-makers as fellow professionals seems very common across policy sectors, even though there are variations in the degree of cohesiveness of policy-communities, sufficient for some writers to suggest the need for a more sophisticated typology. In particular, a distinction between 'policy community' and 'policy network' has been suggested, with 'policy community' identifying "those actors and potential actors drawn from the universe who share a common policy focus. Network is the linking process within a community or between two or more communities".[18]

However, referring specifically to government/industry relations in Britain, Wilks and Wright appear to be rather close to our own description of the policy process (which elsewhere we give the general term 'bureaucratic accommodation"[19]). Thus, they comment that "where the policies of government are overly rhetorical, as arguably they are in Britain, they offer little guidance for the practical conduct of relations with industry. To fill the vacuum, administrators will develop and adapt a pragmatic relationship".[20]

Studies of the relationship between specific industrial sectors and government in Britain support this view of a pragmatic negotiated, relationship. For example, MacMillan and Turner's study of government-industry relations in the pharmeceutical sector in the UK found that "the relationship which grew up between the DHSS (Department of Health and Social Security) and the ABPI (The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry).... during the period from 1957 to 1983, adheres closely to the characteristic pattern of government-interest group relations described by Richardson and Jordan .... A 'routine' and 'regulated' relationship was established to resolve issues of mutual concern... Out of mutual interest was born a sense of community and a tendency to accommodate and compromise: the necessity for stability was reconciled with the need for change by bargaining and adjustments..."[21] However, of particular interest is the way that this established relationship has changed, in part because "...the policy network established between government and the pharmaceutical industry can be disconnected by shifts in government policy brought on by changes in the social and political environment".[22] (See section 4 below for a discussion of this general phenomenon and its importance for government/group relations in the 1980s).

A similarly co-operative relationship between government and industry in other industrial sectors appears to exist. For example Appleby and Bessant's study of the foundry sector in Britain has produced an interesting contrast between the corporatist model of West Germany and the pluralist model in Britain. Thus they comment, "the corporatist model assumes sound and developing links; the pluralist model, a set of inconsistent and weak relationships with government, involving a multiplicity of interest groups. In contrast to this, we have found strong and developing links to government in the UK and an arm's-length and generalised relationship only in West Germany".[23] The study by Grant et al of the chemical industry also suggests a close government/group relationship (again using the policy community concept). They write "... in Britain we have found that the chemical industry has a good relationship with the Chemicals and Textiles Division at DTI (Department of Trade and Industry), but has had more problems in its relationship with other ministries which lie outside the core chemicals policy community. We see the main constituents of this community as the leading firms (especially ICI), the CIA (Chemicals Industry Association) and the Chemicals and Textiles Division of DTI".[24] This observation highlights our comment above regarding the sectorisation/segmentation of policy-making. Sectorisation, (common throughout most of Western Europe) both facilitates and restricts group participation in the policy process. It facilitates it because sectorisation enables problems to become *manageable,* by artifically breaking linkages between many policy problems. It hinders it because it tends to confine groups to participation in 'their' communities and networks, even though the business of other communities and networks may be very relevant to their interests. A good example of this

'exclusion', is provided in Lowe and Goyder's study of environmental groups in Britain. They point out that, although the vast majority of national environmental groups have good access to 'relevant' departments and agencies (the mean reported contact was six government organisations per group), the main departments concerned with development proposals (e.g. industrial and economic departments) were less accessible, and such consultation as takes place is token, in nature.[25] Sectorisation may, therefore, place government in a somewhat more favourable position than groups in being able to arbitrate between sectors and between policy communities or networks.

Government, in any case, is a special kind of actor in the process of mediating between the particularistic demands of groups and whatever the 'national interest' is deemed to be – unless the national interest is merely the equilibrium of group pressures. As we shall see in section 4 below, government can and does intervene decisively in order to shift the equilibrium which has been carefully negotiated and constructed with interests in earlier periods. Rhodes too – in discussing the relationship between local authority associations and government – has pointed to the capacity of government to manage group/government relationships. Thus in his eleven rules of the game governing relations between local authority associations and government, he includes the power of governmental coercion; thus – pragmatism, consensus, fairness, accommodation, territoriality, secrecy, depoliticization, summit diplomacy, local democracy, the right to govern, and trust. Of the eleven rules derived from his analysis of the particular policy area, the following are especially relevant to our review of group-government relations; viz

Consensus – agreed settlements are preferable to imposed solutions.

> Accommodation – where agreement is not possible, the 'loser' is not antagonised, a special case of the British love of the underdog, and pains will be taken – through consultation over details - to minimise losing over the principles of policy.
>
> The right to govern – certain matters are in the national interest and the centre has both the right to intervene to preserve that interest and a monopoly of legitimate coercion to impose its definition of the national interest.
>
> Trust – access to discussions, secret and otherwise, and effectiveness in these discussions hinges on assessments of reliability – if and only if a group is deemed reliable, as in the case of the associations, will it command an entrée and attention.[26]

In practice, government can declare *unilateral* changes in the rules of the game, to which, usually, the groups then have to accommodate. However, as we shall see, the technique, in such situations is to invoke Rhodes rule 4 - namely to re-introduce the old rules of the game, **i.e.** bargaining and consensus, over matters of detailed implementation.[27] Before discussing this strategem - increasingly common in the 1980s as the Conservative Government began to attack those very stable "distributional coalitions", identified by Olson as the cause of Britain's economic decline - we turn to a review of types of issues and types of groups, as there is a need to refine our general picture of heavy emphasis on group-departmental relations, stability, and bargaining.

3. TYPES OF ISSUES AND TYPES OF GROUPS

In arguing that bureaucratic accommodation was the dominant mode of group-government relations in Britain,[28], it is nevertheless recognised that the variety of group-government relations is far greater than this model suggests. Not all issues are processed in the same way, not all groups are

equal, and relationships and the distribution of power change over time. Stability and negotiated order are the expectation and the goal - but change can and does take place and there are significant sectoral differences. Indeed, Roberts warns, correctly, that "...political scientists cannot, and should not, pontificate about the relative importance of public opinion, parties, Parliament, civil servants or ministers as targets for pressure groups, without carefully underlining the case-by-case variations in the significance of any or all of these for pressure-groups in Britain".[29] Characterisations of government-group relations are just that – characterisations. They cannot capture *all* of the variations in group behaviour or in group influence across policy sectors or over time. The heavy cultural emphasis on the integration of groups and the high legitimacy of group influence does not *guarantee* universal access or influence.

Perhaps the most systematic and analytical review of a whole category of groups is Whiteley and Winyard's study of the poverty lobby. Potentially, the lobby is quite large. For example they found over 500 organisations listed in one source, although the main list of nationally active anti-poverty pressure groups was forty-two.[30] Within the sector, the size and nature of groups varies enormously - from the Spastics Society, with over 1,000 full-time staff and a budget of £15 million, to the Campaign for the Mentally Handicapped with just one full-time member of staff and a borrowed office.[31] Not only is the group universe varied – but the environment in which it operates is complex. Thus, Whiteley and Winyard write:

> At one level are the other actors in the social security issue community including civil servants politicians and other organisations such as producer interest groups. At another level there are different issue communities competing for scarce

> resources so that trade-offs have to be made, for example between health, education, defence and agriculture. At a third level the entire policy process in Britain is subject to exogenous influences from the international economy, and increasingly from international organisations.[32]

Hinting at the fundamental problems faced by the poverty lobby, they comment that much of the work of the groups is reactive, responding to government initiatives and proposals. It is no surprise, therefore, to learn that their conclusion is that the poverty lobby is "... influential rather than powerful, although on occasions they can exercise power by altering agendas. They cannot, however, force governments to change policies or do something which they otherwise would not do, because of the threat of sanctions".[33]

Group *sanctions* are generally thought to be central to group influence, of course. Finer's work, cited above, identified the co-operation of groups with ministries as central to the system of administration in Britain. He argued that "some associations – the interest groups not the promotional ones, and the 'earner' or 'producer' type of interest, not the 'consumers'– have it in their power to apply a threat or sanction of such sort against the departments or even against an elected government of which they disapprove".[34] His early classification of groups – into the business lobby, the labour lobby, the Co-operative movement, the professions, civic groups, special sections of the population, the Churches, and evangelical groups, and education, recreational and cultural groups, appear also to be a reflection of their relative powers to threaten, if not use, sanctions. Yet how times change! No one, today, would dream of even mentioning the Co-operative movement, and we have seen an enormous decline in the power of trade unions as pressure groups. Moreover, it should not be

assumed that the election of a Conservative Government in 1979 - and its success in being re-elected twice - has necessarily increased business power. As Wyn Grant notes, British business is not a particularly effective group. His central argument is that "...Britain has a business sector in which there is an increasing concentration of economic power, but that business remains politically weak, making it difficult for government to enter into a partnership relationship with business even if it wanted to".[35] Bluntly, he declares that "Business in Britain has not been able to get its political act together". This is not to deny *influence*, just as Whiteley and Winyard ascribe influence and not power to the poverty lobby, but is to suggest that when the chips are down, business is relatively ineffective. Thus in times of crisis, "the leadership, in terms of developing a strategy, has come from politicians with their own vision of what business needs. This is particularly true of the Thatcher Government which represents a departure from the historical relationship between business and the state in Britain of 'bargaining between two entities which often did not know their own minds' ".[36]

Here, a distinction needs to be made between group influence at a sectoral level and group influence over broader national – and hence cross-sectoral issues. As Grant notes, there is a lack of 'employer solidarity' (found in West Germany, for example) and a high degree of differentiation at the sectoral and local levels. As we saw earlier at the sectoral level, we can often identify effective policy-communities in which business organisations play an important role. In this context, it is important to remember Hoffmann's destinction between 'high' and 'low' politics. There is a danger that pressure group analysts will fail to distinguish between group activity that is concerned with minor manageable issues (for

example the new regulations governing the use of micro-wave ovens were clearly a 'bargained' outcome in the autumn of 1989 when it was discovered that up to one-third of ovens sold were defective) and group activity on the really big issues for society such as nuclear defence or Britain's role in the European Community. Hoffmann's distinction is between those issues which have a major bearing on the viability of the nation state, which he classes as "high politics" and those issues which are concerned with less fundamental problems, which he classes as 'low'.[37] The logic of sectorisation – and the logic of bargaining within sectors – probably works towards the disaggregation of all policy issues into 'low' and 'manageable' problems. 'High' politics are *eventually* translated into implementation through specific decision processes which resemble the decisions on the technicalities of low politics. Indeed, we suggest below (section 4) that the post-1979 Thatcher Governments have recognised this important distinction and have sometimes taken decisions to exclude groups from 'high politics' but to operate the traditional style of bargaining, once the 'stuff' of high politics gets down to the implementation level. This emphasises the strength of governments in being able to determine (or at least influence strongly) the "who, when, and how" of group participation in the policy process.

Groups, particularly sectoral groups, have always been concerned with the practicalities of *technical issues* because to them the technical issue is where the policy impinges on their members' activities. Even groups concerned with the broader issues of policy recognise that, at the end of the day, the real bargaining may be at the margin of policies. Again citing Whiteley and Winyard's study of the poverty lobby, it is clear that the anti-poverty groups often see 'success' as relating to what appears to be quite small issues on the broader canvass of policy as a whole, even though,

occasionally, 'big' victories have been won. For example they contrast changed travel grants for prisoners' wives, with the increases in family allowances won by the Child Poverty Action Group.[38] The 'realism' of groups is perhaps best summarised by a quotation from a Washington lobbyist, which could apply equally to Britain – "we don't come here to change the world. We come to minimise our surprises!" In terms of intermediation between the State and the thousands of organised interests in society, it would be almost impossible to find an issue in which there was *no* group involvement, and therefore relatively few issues where no concessions are made to groups. This is because every issue is 'organised' and there is a strong attachment to the rules of the game, on both sides. But, this does not mean total uniformity of behaviour. As suggested earlier, policy change does take place – often as a result of changes of circumstance beyond the control of any of the existing actors. This opens up new opportunities for policy change and for a new pattern of winners and losers.

Smith's study of agricultural policy is a perfect example of this change taking place. The agricultural sector is the classic case of highly integrated groups, with a symbiotic relationship between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food (MAFF) and the agricultural interests such as the National Farmers' Union (NFU), and the Country Landowners' Association (CLA). Grant has noted that the farmers have been "a particularly influential sectoral group"[39] and Smith observes that, after the period 1930-1939, which was a period of pluralism but unstable agendas in agriculture, the period 1940-1980 saw a stable agenda with a closed policy community.

> The agenda was protected by an ideology of expansion and the system of policy-making. Through the policy community, groups which were likely to challenge the agenda were excluded. The Annual Review of prices included only producers. It was believed that the National Farmers' Union represented all sections of the industry and that there was no reason to include other groups in assessing the economic prospects of agriculture.[40]

Interestingly, in terms of today's political agenda, the environmentalists "...were not even conceived as having any relevance for agricultural policy because it was argued that the farmer was the custodian of the countryside".[41] Contrast this view with a recent publication by the Government (in response to growing criticism of the environmental effects of its own and the European Community's agricultural policy) in which it stated that "Some regulation is essential. Conflicts of interest will arise between economic development and the protection of the physical environment. Standards of pollution control must be maintained and special protection provided for endangered species of plants and animals. The planning system has an important role to play and particularly stringent controls will continue to be necessary in especially vulnerable areas".[42] The change in the agricultural agenda in the 1980s came about because of developments within the agricultural sector itself – mainly overproduction in the EC and changing agricultural practices, particularly the increased use of chemical pesticides and nitrogenous fertilizers – and also because of developments outside the sector - namely the fact that the environment became a significant political issue again. Thus, Smith notes, that "from the late 1970s and throughout the eighties there has been an increased questioning of the level of agricultural support and production. The mistrust of the established agenda has come mainly from two very diverse sources: the Right of the Conservative Party and the environmental

movement".[43] This has produced, according to Smith, an increasingly dramatic 'war of position'[44] as various groups put forward new ideas for agricultural policy. Despite this (and in part because of the Common Agricultural Policy in the EC) the policy community has managed to preserve many of its cherished policies.[45]

Smith warns us that it is wrong to attribute the agenda changes solely to pressure groups. This 'war of position' has occurred because of structural changes – such as over-production, the increased costs of policy, forcing the EC to deal with new questions such as how to reduce the level of production and how to protect the environment. Essentially, the failure of the policy community to provide solutions creates pressures for new issues to be raised. In conclusion, he argues,

> The traditional explanations of agenda change are inadequate in the case of British agricultural policy because they do not explain how policy changes when there is a closed policy community. As a consequence, they over-emphasise the role of pressure groups. Pressure groups are the major determinant of change only in *certain* circumstances. In British agricultural policy the existence of a closed policy community and a firmly established agenda limited the role that excluded pressure groups could play in raising new issues. Therefore, the increased pluralism.... was not initiated by groups. It resulted from changes in external circumstances which presented new problems. Once the existing policy paradigm was undermined space was created for excluded pressure groups to challenge the existing community.[46]

Yet, even in this fascinating tale, groups apparently use existing policy-making structures to preserve their position, even when faced with challenges in the agenda setting process. Thus Smith's final comment reminds us that *structures* do matter (in his case study, the EC is of course

enormously important) and that groups recognise this too. Values and processes do not exist in the ether – they are anchored in political structures. Groups have, traditionally, targetted those structures which encapsulate the greatest concentration of power (both in terms of policy formulation and implementation). Hence the notion of 'targetting' pressure – traditionally on a continuum of Whitehall (*i.e* bureaucracy) – then Westminster *(i.e.* legislature), then public (electorate), with relationships in policy communities and networks often transgressing structural boundaries. Well established groups have a keen sense of where *their* best contacts lie and exercise some rational choice in the use of lobbying resources. In the case of the poverty lobby, there is, apparently, occasionally a conscious *rejection* of the conventional wisdom that group/bureaucratic connections are the most valuable as a means of exercising influence. Notwithstanding the fact that the most common type of contact was with Whitehall (and with producer groups) there was sometimes a caution about Whitehall contacts if agenda change was the group's objective. Thus, the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) *avoided* too close a contact with civil servants because the main job of the group was felt to be to "shift government, not chat with civil servants". The overall strategy of CPAG was "to put poverty back on the agenda".[47] Groups have a "menu" of targets depending upon circumstances. Thus Charles Miller, (a professional lobbyist) in his excellent, practitioner-oriented book on lobbying government, also points out that "...power centres confirm academic generalisations about the relative importance of different political structures". He lists the following assumptions about the power structure:

1. That power of Parliament depends upon the size of the Government's majority.

2. That individual MPs are usually only able to sway the Executive on

personal constituency issues, unless, like the Chairman of the 1922 Committee, they represent a powerful block of opinion.

3. That real power rests far further down the Civil Service hierarchy than is often believed. The crucial grades are Principal – Under-Secretary.

4. The ministerial decisions often do no more than endorse letters, briefs, and draft legislation produced for them by their officials. Far less policy is initiated from top down than is believed.

5. That Cabinet Committees are more influential than Cabinet itself.

6. That decisions in Government are rarely single-faceted: they are the product of a complex coalition of forces, with two or more Departments, Cabinet Committees, Parliament, public and media opinion, the Policy Unit (in Downing Street), Prime Minister and declared Party policy all acting as pressures on the lead Minister in each case.[48]

Miller hints (without using the term sector) at sectoral differences in policy-making. For example, he comments that "Two Departments, the Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence, although falling within the Treasury net, are worlds of their own because of the structure and functions of the Diplomatic service and the extensive cross-fertilisation of M.O.D. officials and Services staff".[49] These sectors certainly exhibit far less pressure group influence than, say, education, and might be characterised as examples of "internalised policy-making"[50] It would be impossible to claim that, say, the decision to adopt the new Trident missile system owed much to group pressure or indeed that many (if any) groups had a role to play in the process at all. There would be much bargaining *within* Whitehall, but the relevant external 'constituency' is small, consisting of individuals and possibly firms. Many foreign affairs decisions will also be of this type, even though it would be much easier to identify a largish number of pressure groups interested in foreign policy. Their involvement

is, however, generally at the margins of foreign policy, although the increasing links between foreign policy on the one hand, and trade and industrial policy on the other, mean that groups not *primarily* concerned with foreign policy, are increasingly anxious to 'enter' that policy sector. For example, in 1989 Britain was in considerable conflict with her European partners over the proposed EC "Social Charter", with the media blaming the conflict on Mrs. Thatcher's alleged anti-European sentiments. Yet, it gradually emerged that powerful industrial interests in Britain were in fact strongly opposed to much of the Social Charter and had taken a keen interest in the whole issue.

Sectoral differences in group access are still, of course, broad-sweep generalisations. As Charles Miller pointed out, each issue has specific characteristics and this can change the nature and degree of group influence. Some issues are impossible to process in the bureaucratic arena - abortion being a classic example. Marsh and Chambers' study is convincing in its assertion that in so-called conscience issues, "... Parliament is the main battlefield with interest groups attempting, by a variety of means, to put pressure on MPs to promote or support their cause. Parliamentary lobbying thus comes into its own".[51] Even solidly economic issues - normally processed in the bureaucratic arena in a process of intimate bargaining between officials and groups – can suddenly 'exit' the arena and achieve greater political salience and, hence, parliamentary involvement. For example in December 1989, the details of an agreement between British Aerospace and the Department of Trade and Industry regarding the earlier sale of the publicly owned Rover Group to British Aerospace became public via a report from the Comptroller and Auditor General. This resulted in a parliamentary (and EC) row and in a sudden widening of involvement in the

policy process.

That Parliament may have been somewhat underrated in pressure group studies (including those by this author, it should be said!) is born out by the more recent evidence on the rapid growth of professional lobbying firms in Britain. Grantham refers to "... the presence on the political stage in Britain of a growing breed of specialists employed in 'political consultancy', 'public affairs', 'government relations', 'lobbying' and 'political PR' .... the number of such firms has been growing steadily since 1979 and shows no signs of receding" [52]. Although not exclusively concerned with *Parliamentary* lobbying, many of these firms appear to see this as one of their main roles and have their best contacts in this arena, rather than, say, with the bureaucracy in Whitehall. As Grantham observes "The extent to which consultancy firms focus their attention on Parliament is a cause of much debate within the industry. Though the emphasis varies, Parliament does not by and large constitute an exclusive focus for the consultants. Nonetheless, in most cases, it is a major and visible focus".[53] Jordan has estimated that there may be approximately 100 firms offering consultancy services, with something like a dozen being recognised as dominant.[54] He quoted Miller as suggesting that the current vogue for 'parliamentary consultants' is misguided. Thus, "For a consultant to direct his clients down the parliamentary road because he knows no better is to turn what is often an administrative or technical matter into political one".[55] Jordan (as does this author) is in sympathy with Miller's view that lobbying firms should "think Government not Parliament" and concludes that, with regard to this burgeoning industry, "we need to weigh the impact, not count the claims".[56]

This points us back to government, of course, a singularly

appropriate focus in post-1979 British politics, with a growing debate about the re-emergence of the strong state.

4. POLICY CHANGE AND THE CHALLENGE TO GROUPS

It is now conventional wisdom that British politics changed after the election of Mrs. Thatcher in 1979. For example, Kavanagh has written that Britain has abandoned "....like a paradigm, the old Butskellite optimism and Social Democratic and Keynesian policies.... as more and more anomolies have crept in".[57] The end of at least part of the post-war consensus is important for our analysis of group behaviour, if only because it emphasises the importance of Rhodes' corrective to analyses of policy community politics – namely, that governments can do and do govern. In several key policy areas we have seen the post-1979 Conservative Governments consciously challenge the power of existing policy communities, and especially the power of groups within those communities.[58] A more *dirigiste* style of policy-making has undoubtedly emerged with a number of spectacular conflicts between government and hitherto were established groups. For *some* issues in *some* sectors, Britain has moved away from the 'toothless tripartism' described by Hayward in an earlier decade.[59]

The 1984/5 dispute with the National Union of Mineworkers is the most spectacular example of this new style. A year-long strike (at great expense to the government's expenditure plans) resulted in a major victory for Mrs. Thatcher's government and is perhaps the most dramatic example of the great decline in influence of the trade unions as pressure groups.

Much more important, however, were the successive waves of trade union reform legislation introduced by the Conservatives since 1979. These reforms were largely a case of the government deciding on action, and the relevant policy-communities having to take it or leave it. This strategy was possible because the climate of opinion was already very hostile to the unions and because economic conditions so weakened the position of the unions in the labour market, that they were unable to mobilise their membership against policy change.

Similarly, local government and the local authority associations found themselves in an unfavourable resource-squeeze situation, which encouraged government to accelerate some long-standing trends towards greater central control over local authorities. While it is possible to argue that central-local relations may now be returning to something akin to the old-style bargaining which used to characterise this sector in earlier periods of resource expansion, there is no doubt that the Government has re-written the rule-book of government/group relations in this sector. Bargaining never quite disappeared and it is now more evident again, but no-one could claim that the local government reforms have been a genuinely bargained outcome – or equilibrium of group pressures. One actor – the Government – has been dominant since 1979, but is now more prepared to seek 'consensus' on a new 'middle-ground' defined by itself.

Another policy sector where the rules of group politics have been re-written, is unemployment. Here a strange mixture of policy styles has operated, in which there have been many elements of the traditional group accommodation – for example until 1988 this was one area where 'tripartism' appeared to be alive and well. Yet it also exhibited the more

dirigiste characteristics referred to above, which determined the scope of group influence. Essentially, the Government was *not* prepared to bargain over its overall economic strategy, which in turn had great effects on the levels of unemployment. Group politics could be played in the unemployment and training policy sector as before, but only in the context of the Government's Medium Term Financed Strategy (MTFS). In particular, the trade unions could not shift the Government from its primary aim of restructuring British industry and increasing Britain's competitiveness. However, the unions *were* heavily involved in delivery (and to some extent in the formulation) of the Government's specific anti-unemployment politics. Also, very many other pressure groups were drawn into participation in this sector, in what we have elsewhere termed the "unemployment industry".[60] The crucial point here is that there was plenty of group participation (even the exercise of a veto by the TUC on certain issues) but it was confined to those issues and problems on which the *Government* was prepared to bargain. Moreover, as circumstances changed in late 1988 – the Conservatives had won their third election in a row and unemployment had by then fallen dramatically producing a fall in the political salience of the issue – the Government was able to move to abolish the long-standing tripartite machinery and virtually to exclude the unions from national policy formulation. The new unemployment and training policy is now private sector dominated, in the context of increased power for the Department of Employment. The new Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) will have formal contracts with the Department of Employment and will have at least two-thirds of their members drawn from the private sector. This policy area is, therefore, a good example of the way in which the balance of group power can shift over time, as new circumstances present policy-change opportunities which governments can exploit.

The declining political salience of unemployment as an issue was a key factor in bringing about a change in the role of groups. In other policy areas, the Government has challenged groups in the absence of any exogenous changes. Some of the most entrenched professions, for example, have been subject to systematic challenges to their traditional franchises. Opticians, solicitors and barristers, teachers and dons, bankers and even doctors have all had to *react* to policy change proposed by governments and from outside the traditional policy community (*e.g.* from several right-wing think tanks). As Day and Klein have suggested, a power struggle has developed in the public sector, in which the various professions have faced

> ...a threat to the traditional claim of service providers to immunity from scrutiny.... it represents, for the professions, a move from status to contract .... no longer is it being assumed that the status of dons, teachers or doctors somehow gives them authority, and the right to use public funds in ways they alone deem to be appropriate. In short, they are to be accountable as never before.[61]

Throughout 1989 we saw open battles between the Government and the doctors over the Government's plans for reforming the NHS (involving budgets for GPs, internal markets and the possibility of hospitals 'opting out' of existing management structures); conflict between Government and teachers over the concept of a core curriculum, national testing of standards, and teacher evaluation; conflict between the Government and barristers over the possibility of granting solicitors the right to appear in higher courts; and conflict between the Government and universities over changes in the funding mechanism for universities. While there is always a problem of

resourcing which adds to the pressure for policy change (for example the hoped for doubling of student numbers in universities would be *very* expensive to achieve under existing student support policies), it would be difficult to see these changes as being forced upon the Government. In so far as conflict resulted (and it did) it was self-induced by the Government. Basically, the Government had decided that policy change was necessary and realised that change would challenge existing fiefdoms.

Yet this 'confrontational' style was often not well thought through. Radical changes would be proposed, thus producing a sense of crisis in the policy area, to be followed by a degree of indecision by government, as the group activity (fury sometimes) developed. Riddell has characterised it nicely, as follows: "Thus we see an initial dithering and uncertainty in response to crisis, departments waiting for a lead from Mrs. Thatcher, and then a decisive initiative leading to radical change".. [62] As suggested earlier, government-group bargaining appears to re-assert itself at some stage in the process. Thus, in the policy areas where groups have been challenged directly by the Government, those very same groups *have* been consulted and bargained with over the practicalities of policy implementation. Providing the main policy thrust remains intact, the government has been prepared to accommodate group pressures. Moreover, the groups seem to recognise, eventually, the strength of the Government's position in the relationship. Thus, elements of the 'strong state' have crept into government-group relations in Britain, alongside more traditional group politics.

In some cases of radical policy change, however, quite major elements of the policy have been subject to group bargaining. Privatisation is a particularly clear example of this where virtually every key interest was

'bought off' (literally in some cases!) by the Government. Industries have been privatised in such a way as to satisfy the demands of the management of the existing publicly-owned industries; employees were offered very favourable share ownership deals; the public were offered attractive share ownership opportunities; and City interests gained via handling the share issue for the Government and by being able to invest in what are virtually private monopolies. The consequence has been that the privatised industries have not produced very competitive, liberalised sectors. The new policies reflect the strength of *existing* groups and the willingness of the Government to accommodate those groups in order to make privatisation a financial "success".[63]

In the case of privatisation, it was possible for the Government to achieve its major goal – moving the industries from the public to the private sector at a considerable financial benefit to the Exchequer – while at the same time accepting group demands. The cost was a less competitive regime than could have been achieved had the *dirigiste* style, exhibited towards the National Union of Mineworkers, been maintained! In other sectors, such as health, the conflict with groups has become more intense because it is virtually impossible to achieve the policy goals without *imposing* decisions on the health policy community. Concepts of competition and accountability really do strike at the roots of group power in the health sector, and the interests have used every conceivable tactic in order to resist the change - from full page advertisements in national newspapers, attacking the Secretary of State for Health, to court actions (unusual for British pressure groups) designed to prevent the Secretary of State spending £60 million on implementing the NHS reforms before the House of Commons had passed the legislation. (This legal action was

taken by a newly formed group of 3,000 hospital consultants, opposed to the NHS reforms). At the time of writing, it is difficult to predict the detailed outcome of the battle over NHS reforms, other than to say that it seems likely that the Government will manage to introduce *some* radical changes - even if only as 'experiments' and 'pilot' schemes – by offering various financial incentives. In the case of the reforms of the legal profession, concessions were made, but the main thrust of policy could be maintained because the lawyers lacked the broadly-based popular support enjoyed by the doctors.

This 'mixed' policy style - which has certainly changed the nature of group-government relations on some issues - is further complicated by Britain's membership of the European Community. Increasingly, policy decisions are either reached in Brussels or they are greatly influenced by developments within the Community. The environmental sector is a good example, where the rather well "regulated" relationship between groups and government which has hitherto characterised the policy area[64] is bound to change as Commission Directives begin to impinge on British environmental policy. This major change in the *structure* of policy-making is of major importance to British pressure groups in at least two respects. Firstly it *complicates* their task. No longer do they face a single, well-understood, unitary, executive-dominated state with which to bargain. Gone are the days when a group could rely on long-standing contacts with the relevant division of the appropriate government department in Whitehall. Basically, Whitehall cannot guarantee to 'deliver' nowadays, because in its turn, it has to bargain with Brussels and with the other member states. Secondly, EC membership presents new *opportunities* for lobbying, in that failure in Britain may be countered by

success at the Community level. To take the environmental sector again, there is every sign that the Community is more sympathetic than is the British Government to some of the demands of the environmentalists.

Studies of other sectors indicate that British groups are indeed adapting to the structural and processual changes caused by Britain's membership of the EC. For example, Grant et al, in their study of relations between government and the chemical industry, indicate the increasing importance of the Commission in the field of environmental regulation of the chemical industry in Britain. So far this has not disadvantaged the industry as "... policy formulation has taken place in a relatively depoliticised atmosphere where the chemical industry was able to deploy its massive expertise and where environmental groups were sparsely represented".[65] However, the industry is now somewhat worried as "it is feared that the policy sector will become more politicised, and the Commission will make much greater efforts to involve environmental groups in the policy network".[66] This observation points to what may be a developing trend - namely that groups disadvantaged at one level may seek other access points (as in federal systems) where their leverage may be greater. For example Sonia Mazey's study of European Community action on behalf of women reveals that the activity of the disparate women's organisations in the Community is being co-ordinated at the Community level by the Centre for Research on European Women (CREW) which was established in Brussels in 1983 "... as a *de facto* lobby for further Community action on behalf of women". She notes, further, that CREW also runs the European Network for Women (ENOW) "... which attempts to co-ordinate action by independent feminist groups in different Member States. While these groups have different.... objectives, their combined activities have served to open up the debate for further action".[67]

The co-ordination of group activity at the EC level is also discussed in Jane Sargent's review of the organisation of business interests at the European level. Not only are groups adapting their *internal* structures in order to deal with "Europe" but they are also developing their participation in Europe-wide groups. She argues that three sets of channels of representation are being developed "... to national bodies, to European interest groups, and direct to EC bodies". She also emphasises the multiplicity of access points created by membership of the EC, suggesting that groups select those channels "... which appear to them to be most appropriate, on a policy-by-policy basis".[68]

It is, therefore, increasingly difficult to sustain the relatively simple image of pressure group politics in Britain. Though no doubt accurate for most of the post-war period, the characterisation is now more complex. Most issues, most of the time, exhibit the traditional highly integrated group involvement. Yet the breakdown of the post-war consensus, as much due to the force of circumstances as it is due to so-called 'Thatcherism'; the particular desires of the post-1979 Conservative Governments to introduce significant, and indeed radical, policy change in some hitherto stable policy areas; and the growing importance of the policy process at the European level, all suggest that we may be witnessing a paradigm shift in the rules of the game for group involvement.

REFERENCE

1. Finer, S. E. (1958), *Anonymous Empire* (London: Pall Mall), p. 5.

2. Lowe, P. and Goyder, J. (1983) *Environmental Groups in Politics*, (London: Allen & Unwin, p.17.)

3. Ashby, E.and Anderson, M. (1981) *The Politics of Clean Air* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 7.

4. Hollis, P. (1974) *Pressure From Without in Early Victorian England* (London: Edward Arnold), p. vii.

5. loc cit.

6. For a discussion of this term in its current usage see Grant, W. (1978), *Insider Groups, Outsider Groups and Interest Group Strategies in Government*, University of Warwick, Department of Politics Working Paper No. 19.

7. Hollis, op cit. p. 14.

8. Hollis, op.cit, p. 25.

9. Olson, M. (1982) *The Rise and Fall of Nations*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press), p. 78.

10. Beer, S. (1982) *Britain Against Itself* (London: Faber & Faber) pp. 24-5.

11. Brittan, S. (1983) *The Role and Limits of Government* (London: Temple Smith) p. 7.

12. For example see Mazey, Sonia, (1986), "Public Policy-Making in France: the Art of the Possible", *West European Politics*, Vol. 9 (3) pp. 412-429.

13. Richardson, J. J. and Jordan, A. G. (1985), *Governing Under Pressure : The Policy Process in a Post-Parliamentary Democracy*, (Oxford : Basil Blackwell), pp. 43-44.

14. See Jordan, A.G. and Richardson J. J. (1984), "Engineering a Consensus: from the Finniston Report to the Engineering Council", *Public Administration*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (Winter), pp. 383-400. See also Jordan A. G. (1990). *The Engineer in the Economy*, OUP, forthcoming.

15. For a fuller discussion see Jordan A. G. and Richardson J. J. (1987) *Government and Pressure Groups in Britain* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, pp. 127-160).

16. Finer, Loc cit.

17. Coates, Dudley (1984) "Food Law", in Lewis, D. & Wallace, H. (eds.) *Policies into Practice* (London, Exeter: HEB) pp. 144-160.

18. Wilks, S.and Wright M. (1987), *Comparative Government-Industry Relations. Western Europe, The United States, Japan*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press) p. 298.

19. Jordan, A. G.and Richardson, J.J. (1982) "The Logic of Negotiations", in Richardson, J.J. (ed.), *Policy Styles in Western Europe*, (London Allen & Unwin).

20. Wilks and Wright op.cit p. 291.

21. Macmillan K. and Turner I. 1987, "The Cost Containment Issue : A Study of Government-Industry Relations in the Pharmaceutical Sectors of the United Kingdom and West Germany", in Wilks and Wright (1987), p. 121.

22. Ibid. p. 138.

23. Appelby, Colin, and Bessant, John (1987) "Adapting to Decline: Organisational Structures and Government Policy in the UK and West Germany Foundry Sectors" in Wilks and Wright (1987), p. 206.

24. Grant, Wyn, Paterson, William and Whitston, Colin (1987), "Government-Industry Relations in the Chemical Industry: an Anglo-German Comparison", in Wilks and Wright, p.58.

25. Lowe and Goyder op cit.

26. Rhodes, R, (1986), *The National World of Local Government* (London: Allen & Unwin, pp. 391-2.)

27. loc cit.

28. See Jordan, A.G. and Richardson, J.J. (1982) and Jordan A. G. and Richardson, JJR (1987) *British Politics and the Policy Process* (London, Allen & Unwin), pp. 153-186.

29. Roberts, Geoffrey, K. (1989), "Pressure Group Politics in Britain", *Parliamentary Affairs,* Vol. 42, No. 2 Review article, p. 282.

30. Whiteley, Paul & Winyard, Stephen, (1987) *Pressure for the Poor* (London, Methuen), p. 17.

31. op cit. p. 20.

32. op cit. p. 60.

33. op cit. p. 135.

34. Finer, op cit. p. 120.

35. Grant, Wyn with Jane Sargent (1987) *Business and Politics in Britain* (London: Macmillan Education), p. 8.

36. Ibid, p. 9 (and quoting Turner 1984, p. 3.)

37. 'Obstinate or Obsolete': The Fate of the Nation State and the Case of Western Europe', *Daedalus*, 95, 3, 862-915.

38. Whiteley and Wingard op cit.

39. Grant, (1987) ibid, p. 139.

40. Smith, Martin, J. (1989), "Changing Agendas and Policy Communities : Agricultural Issues in the 1930s and the late 1980s", *Public Administration*, Vol. 67, p. 158.

41. loc cit.

42. Department of the Environment (1989) *Environment in Trust. The Countryside.*

43. Smith (1989), op cit. p. 159.

44. ibid, p. 160, quoting Gramsci.

45. loc cit.

46. ibid, p. 164.

47. Whiteley and Winyard, op cit. p. 117.

48. Miller, Charles (1987) *Lobbying Government. Understanding and Influencing the Corridors of Power* (Oxford : Basil Blackwell) pp. 53-4.

49. ibid, p. 55.

50. Jordan, A.G.and Richardson, J.J. (1982) "Britain : The Logic of Negotiation?" in Richardson, J.J. *Policy Styles in Western Europe*, (London, Allen & Unwin), p. 97.

51. See Marsh, D. and Chambers, J. (1983) "The Abortion Lobby: Pluralism at Work?" in Marsh & Chambers, *Pressure Politics Interest Groups in Britain, p. 144.*

52. Grantham, Cliff (1989) "Parliament and Political Consultants", *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. p. 503.

53. ibid, p. 505.

54. Jordan, A.G. (1989), "Insider Lobbying : The British Version", *Political Studies*, Vol. xxxvii, p. 107. See also Jordan (1990), forthcoming.

55. ibid, p. 109.

56. ibid, p. 113.

57. Kavanagh, Dennis (1985), "Whatever happened to consensus politics?", *Political Studies* xxxii, No. 4, pp. 529-46. See also Kavanagh, Dennis (1987), *Thatcherism and British Politics : the End of Consensus?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

58. For a discussion of the British policy style in response to the 1976 economic crisis, see Richardson, J.J. (1989) "Britain : changing policy styles and policy innovation in response to economic crisis", in Domgaard, E. Gerlich, P. and Richardson, J.J. *The Politics of Economic Crisis : Lessons from Western Europe*, (Andershot : Avebury).

59. Hayward, J.E.S. (1974) 'National Aptitudes for Planning in Britain, France and Italy, *Government and Opposition*, p, No. 4, pp. 397-410.

60. Moon, Jeremy, & Richardson, J.J. (1984) "The Unemployment Industry" *Policy and Politics*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 391-41.

61. Day, Patricia & Klein, Rudolf (1989), "A Power Struggle in the Public Sector", *The Independent*, 17 August 1989.

62. Riddell, Peter (1988), "Out of Dither into Decisiveness", *The Financial Times*, 27 January 1988.

63. For a discussion of the process and consequences of privatisation see Richardson J.J. (ed.) (1990) *Privatisation and Deregulation in Britain and Canada*,(Aldershot: Avebury).

64. Richardson, J.J. & Watts, N. (1985), *National Policy Styles and the Environment*, (WZB, Berlin), IIUG, pp. 85-16.

65. Grant, Wyn, Paterson, William and Whitson, Colin, (1988), *op cit, p. 303*.

66. loc cit.

67 Mazey, Sonia (1988) "European Community Action on Behalf of Women : The Limits of Legislation", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. XXVII, NO. 1, (September, p. 79.)

68. Sargent, Jane (1987) "The Organisation of Business Interests for European Community Representation", in Grant, Wyn, with Sargent, Jane, *Business and Politics in Britain*, (London: Macmillan Education) pp. 213-238.