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CORPORATISM: THE UNITY AND UTILITY OF THE CONCEPT?

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In a recent paper Wyn Grant (1983) asked "Does Neo Corporatism Tell us Anything We Didn't Know Already?'. His answer, somewhat predictably given his participation in a corporatism based comparative project, was 'Yes'. This present paper seeks to establish that the interests of the neo corporatists are in fact, an established part of the group literature.[1]

Grant gives the impression that neo corporatists as an intellectual breed are a theatened species. He expresses concern that the corporatist effort could be abandoned before corporatist theory has been fully developed or empirically tested. This is not the impression given to the non corporatist watching, in some awe, the wave of footnotes espousing corporatism in article after article. While the internal difficulties of the SSRC seem to have delayed implementation, the SSRC's decision to allocate £250,000 for research on Corporatism and Accountability hardly suggests that corporatism is being neglected.

Grant's pessimism about the corporatist band wagon can only be explained by the extraordinary sensitivity of some corporatists to challenge. Any dissent seems to prompt exaggerated responses. Grant himself labels doubters "intellectual skinheads"; he warns that academic criticism could turn into destructive negativism. The arguments of those who

argue that corporatism doesn't exist in Britain are says Grant, parochial, false and trivial (p12). The corporatist doyen, Schmitter, manages to smear his critics in suggesting that they differ considerably in ideological motivation and scholarly competence" (1982, p261).

These comments that show such concern that corporatism has not been treated fairly and with the highest academic standards perhaps imply that the corporatists have themselves treated the pluralism they seek to supplant in exemplary fashion. This is not the case.

As a preliminary to the discussion of corporatist theory, one can note that there is no consensus in the camp. This problem is not unique to corporatism, but the attempts to claim their failure to agree with each other as a strength is unconvincing (see for example Lehmbruch, 1979(b), p299)[2]. There is self acknowledged variation between the uses of various corporatist protagonists, but the inconsistencies are not admitted as weaknesses. For example Lehmbruch (1982, p2) argues that the plurality of conceptualizations mirrors the high degree of interrelatedness of the "pluri-dimensions" of the concept. Schmitter, equally optimistic, talks about "productive confusion". The acerbic literary style of Schmitter would not be so generous in describing inconsistencies among his critics. R Martin has drawn particular attention to the disunity of the corporatists on the question of the "State". Given that

Schmitter had claimed that corporatism provided "a different way of conceptualizing the role...of the state"., it would be expected that by now some clear corporatist position would have emerged. But Martin documents a gamut of opinion from the state as executor of policies of groups (Nedelman and Meier 1979), state control (by Schmitter 1979(b)), to state as bargainer (Lehmbruch (a) 1979). Of course pro-corporatists such as Grant (1983, p13) also acknowledge the ambivalence of the state in the model (does the state dominate the interests, or the interests the state?) but he still commends the model to us. But the differences between some self categorised corporatists may be more fundamental than between some of these corporatists and the pluralists they apparently scorn.

Corporatism then is not a single theory but a range of theories which are not self evidently unified or consistent and which have not been demonstrated by any proponent as compatible. The most influential and often quoted definition comes from Schmitter and it is only repeated here (yet again) for convenience of those readers who have not yet memorised it by constant re reading:

> "Corporatism can be defined as a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organised into a limited number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognised or licensed (if not

created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports". (Schmitter 1979, (b), p13).

The definition is well cushioned with reservations, but he does claim detailed inquiry into the extent to which a given system of representation is, limited in the number of component units, compulsory in membership, non-competitive between compartmentalized sectors, etc., will help us distinguish the type of interest system that pertains. One can then stress Schmitter's own emphasis. His approach is intended to allow us to distinguish, by empirical inspection, corporatism from pluralism. But one can note that in practice regimes might be readier to allow effective representation to a limited number of units, with some disputed hierachy of internal structure with quasi - compulsory membership, etc. In other words the empirical examination is likely to be less rewarding, more difficult, than we are lead to believe. While Schmitter confidently states the postulated components of corporatism "can be easily assessed, if not immediately quantified", (Schmitter 1979 (b), p14) such assessment is in fact very difficult.

The main justification for the corporatist cause appears to be to offer a new theoretical paradigm to the study of pressure groups, lobbies, interest associations which had long been (it is

claimed) an area of "conceptual torpor and theoretical othordoxy in the discipline of political science". (Schmitter 1979 (a), p5). Elsewhere he put the goal as to give an explicit alternative to the paradigm of interest politics which has therefore completely dominated the discipline of North American political science : pluralism. (Schmitter, 1979 (b), p14). Were there any doubt about the function of the exercise he also suggested that the element of the corporatist definition constituted, "a sort of paradigmatic revolution when juxtaposed to the long predominant pluralist way of describing and analysing the role of organised interests ..." (1982, p260).

Given the priority Schmitter accords to this purpose, there is a remarkable ambiguity in his presentation of the relationship between pluralist and corporatist ideas. One manifestation of the ambivalence about pluralism is his combination of claims that pluralism has "completely dominated" North American political science and that, "A considerable number and wide variety of scholars have discovered it to be deficient" (1979, p 14). This is a strange kind of dominance that is so widely rejected.

Having noted the considerable number and wide variety of scholars rejecting pluralism, Schmitter goes on to compress the American pluralist debate into six lines in the footnotes (25-27) citing only Lowi, Kariel and McConnell. Given the intention to replace the pluralist model with a superior offering, one would have expected more elaborate connections between Schmitter's

criticisms and the views of the considerable number of other critics. The one author in the corporatist coalition who has gone into some detail on these matters is Anderson (1979). He concludes that his ideas as a corporatist are, in some ways similar to Lowi's conception of juridical democracy: (Anderson, 1979 p297). After his review of, and identification with, the existing American literature, Anderson is hardly in the paradigm revolution business.

Schmitter's attitude to pluralism seems generally hostile, but he does complicate interpretation by his acknowledgement that pluralism and corporatism share a number or basic assumptions, "as would almost any realistic model of modern interest politics" (1979 (b), p15). These are:

(1) the growing importance of formal associational units of representation;
(2) the persistence and expansion of functionally differentiated and potentially conflicting interests;
(3) the burgeoning role of permanent administrative staffs;
(4) the decline in the importance of territorial and partisan representation;
(5) the secular trend towards expansion in the scope of public policy; and
(6) interpenetration of private and public decision areas.

Both pluralsim and corporatism, according to Schmitter, accept and attempt to analyse growing structural differentiation

and interest diversity. But notwithstanding these basic similarities, they are as indicated above, at other times presented as radically different.

Schmitter claims it has been "rather convincingly" shown that Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Austria, Spain, Portugal, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Greece, Mexico, and Yugoslavia fit his corporatist definition (1979 (b), p18). For some cases it seems Schmitter is going some distance beyond the intention of the authors of the studies cited. For example his claim about Norway is based on Stein Rokkan's chapter in Dahl's Political Opposition in Western Democracies, 1966. We know that the article, in its tail piece, turned attention from electoral politics to corporate pluralism, but that seems little enough reason to claim it as validating Schmitter's particular corporatist thesis. A few phrases show that Rokkan's picture scarcely resembles identikit corporatism -"a vast network of interest organisations "(p106)", what really counts is the capacity to...halt a system of highly interdependent activities" (p106); "The Cabinet has increasingly had to take on the role of mediator between the conflicting interests in the national community (107)", "an attempt to establish a Board of Economic Co-ordination on the lines of the Dutch Social-Economische Raad (SER) failed miserably in the early fifties; the partners felt that such a formal body made them hostages of the government" (p108). There is not clear cut evidence here of controlled emergence of groups, quantitative limitation, vertical

stratification, etc. Schmitter's claim as to having shown a fit with his model is overambitious.

As disturbing examples of intellectual imperialism are those where he claims that on the basis of authors such as Lowi, Beer, Dahrendorf, Presthus and Berger, then the USA, Britain, West Germany, Canada, France can be seen as in parts, if not substantial portions 'corporatized'. This, with a vengeance, is a case for citing the old saying "Give a small boy a hammer and everything looks like a nail". And while castigating the misuse of the pluralist paradigm he sees "Something approaching the corporatist model in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, even the USSR, itself (1979 (b), p46).

On the one hand he complains that politics have been labelled pluralist, "for no better reason that the mere existence of a multitude of organised interests", but when on the other hand he cavalierly labels countries as corporatist, he appears to be setting no superior example. For a theory presented as empirically based, there is not a lot of data. For Schmitter to cite Sartori (1970) and complain about pluralism (as a concept) travelling too far, too easily appears suicidal. Sartori complains that cases cannot be proved by transferring the same denomination from one context to another. He says this amounts to pure and simple terminological camouflage: things are declared alike by making them verbally identical.

What is at issue here is the form of argument used by

Schmitter. He labels regions as corporatist, then he calls this purely verbal device "a demonstration of broad structural identity (which has) ...the virtue of debunking, if not divesting, some of these polities of the pluralist labels they have acquired..." (1979 (b) p18). After so "proving" that these many parties are "corporatist", Schmitter lists the characteristics of pluralism that accordingly do not apply:-

competitiveness within sectors,

hence, accountability to members;

cross pressures and overlap and, hence, vacillation and moderation in demands;

open competitiveness between interest sectors,

hence, split-the-difference solutions;

penetration and subordination of political parties,

hence, broad aggregative party goals;

low party discipline, absence of strong partisan ideologies,

absence of stable hierarchies of organisation influence,

hence, irrelevance of class or ruling elite as political categories;

low barriers of entry into the policy process,

hence, key roles assigned to "potential groups" and absence of systematic bias or exclusion;

major importance attached to lobbying and hence, concentration of attention on parliament;

policy initiatives from below and passive roles assumed for state executives and administrative bureaucracies;

wide dispersion of political resources,

hence, neither omnipotent veto groups nor powerless marginal elements; sheer multiplicity of interests (1979 (b), 18-19).

Two main comments need to be made. Firstly Schmitter suggests that these do not apply because the regimes are corporatist, whereas the criteria should determine the conclusion and not vice versa. Secondly, it is in fact at least an open question that policy making is now dominated by widely dispersed political resources. Policy making in Western Europe seems more like Schmitter's pluralism than anything else - ie interest presentation with spontaneous formation, nominal proliferation, horizontal extension and competitive interaction (1979 (b), 16).

Not all the dimensions of his so called pluralist model look useful, but arguably these are deficiences peculiar to his rather exaggerated version of pluralism. Would, in fact, a pluralist be surprised at the developments attracting Schmitter's attention?. And, indeed, would any pluralist recognise, and admit parentage for, the version of pluralism used by Schmitter?.

The fault, if there is one, is not wholly Schmitters, the pluralist literature perhaps differs between what it says and the impression it gives of what it is saying. So many commentators before Schmitter have said that pluralism, is about open access, equal resources, competition etc., that one can only assume that the pluralist exposition is deficient. Schmitter himself (in Berger, p 286) suggests "the 'pluralist' system will be both self

equilibrating and self-legitimating". However has a critic established the origin of such claims in the primary literature?. If one look at the primary literature - and here the discussion is restricted to E. P. Herring Public Administration and the Public Interest, 1936, D. Truman The Government Process, 1951, and R. Dahl, A Preface to Democratic Theory, 1956 - what does one find?[3].

For Herring , if we take them in historical precedence, we discover in the preface that in theory our government should strike a balance among these conflicting forces so as to promote the welfare of all. In fact, he claims, some groups are placed more advantageously than others within our governmental structure and under our industrial system. "The government draws its strength from the very elements it is supposed to regulate. Its officials both elective and appointive are subjected to constant pressure from these powerful interests". Herring continued "Is the scope and development of our administrative service to be determined by the urging of special groups..... How can interests that are socially important but politically weak be given a place in the federal administration". (1936, p 5).

Truman, in turn, does not assume that groups are, by definition, harmful but at the same time it is a preoccupation of his to limit the undesirable aspects of group action. For example, he writes that we cannot hope to protect a governmental system from the results of group organisation unless we have an

adequate understanding of the process of which they are a part. (p 12).

While it would be fair to acknowledge that Truman is prejudiced in favour of the group system - his first chapter is on "The Alleged Mischief of Faction". He does recognise that pathogenic (p 523) "or morbific" (p 516) forms of politics could result from group activity.

Schmitter's apparent reluctance to accept the sheer multiplicity of interests rings untrue as judged by successive case studies. Truman repeatedly returns to complexity - the "bewildering array of groups, multiple access points". Hugh Heclo (1978) wrote about "issue networks" precisely because he noted fragmentation in policy making structures _ a tendency towards atomisation. There is enough in that argument to suggest that Truman with his talk of complexity is nearer the mark (maybe the mark is moving towards him!) than Schmitter with his idea of limited numbers, non-competitive corporatism.

It is quite possible that Schmitter (and others) looking at Truman's chapter "The Web of Relationships in Administrative Process" find that the examples have dated: that the lengthy discussion of the issue of group access, the description of administration (implementation) by groups, and tendencies to the "inflexibility of the established web", and a "closed political processes", were nonetheless inadequately underlined. But it is unhelpful to the development of the discipline to find these

points totally ignored - and a unrealistic version of pluralism put up as a target.

Turning to Dahl, a superficial reading can give some basis for the Schmitter account. In A Preface to Democratic Theory (University of Chicago Press, 1956), Dahl had defined the "normal" process, one in which there is a high probability that all active and legitimate groups in the population can make themselves heard effectively at some crucial stage in the process of decision. A group excluded may nonetheless often gain entry. (p. 138). This assumption of widespread effective influence is a basic pluralist tenet. But Dahl does go on, "Clearly (the capacity to be 'heard') does not mean that every group has equal control over the outcome. In American politics, as in all other societies, control over decisions is unevenly distributed; neither individuals or groups are political equals. When I say a group is heard "effectively" I mean more than the simple fact that it makes a noise; I mean that one or more officials are not only ready to listen to the noise, but expect to suffer in some significant way if they do not placate the group...".

There is not then much justification in the pluralist literature itself - and particularly its critical commentaries - for assuming that all groups are equal, that access is not problemmatical, that there is not a tendency for closed arrangements. Elsewhere (Journal of Public Policy, No. 1, 1981). I have drawn attention to the iron-triangle type literature in

the U.S. In this was a recognition of closed, regularised arrangements. Perhaps one of the problems with the pluralist literature is that there have been two ideas implicit and inadequately delineated. There is a concept of open conflict and ad hoc, competition, but there is also this idea of regularised relations.

If we are interested in the current practices of groups entering closed relations with government, in access to these arrangements being difficult, to imbalances in political resources, to bargaining relationships, there is in existence a weighty literature. If corporatists find this deficient, the onus is nonetheless on them to set out the grounds for deciding to start afresh instead of building on the works of these earlier authors.

A related gap in the Schmitter et al conspectus of the relevant literature is corporate pluralism. Any material not assumed to be corporatist (see Schmitter, 1976 (b), footnotes 30-40) is rejected or given limited prominence.

Schmitter complains, for example, (1979 (b) footnote 19) that Martin Heisler's account of corporatism is faulty as it expressly links zuilen, "pillared", notions to corporatism. However in the Heisler (and Kvavik) chapter (1974) corporatism is certainly not a major theme and indeed they are explicitly cautious in their use of the term. They prefer to discuss "a scheme of sectoral representation akin to neo-corporatism, or

perhaps more accurately, corporate pluralism", (p 42). But what there is in the chapter is a considerable volume of description of practices that seem so close to Schmitter's own interests that some account is called for which either incorporates their work in the new model on offer or suggests why the new model cannot absorb that superficially related material.

Heisler and Kvavik discuss group participation in the decision-making process on a continuing basis. Access is established and structured (p 43); "In Scandinavian politics we find economic sectors....that are highly organised and enjoy substantial self-government. Within each sector, a centralised and bureaucratized network of interest groups serves as the principal means for the advancement and co-ordination of sector interests. Most groups are in a position to develop and implement policy, etc" (p 47); "a decision-making structure characterised by continuous, regularised access for economically, politically, ethnically and/or subculturally based groups to the highest levels of the political system..." (p48); "By being brought into the policy-making structure, the various sectors are given a vested interest in the continued successful operation of the structure...." (p 54). The Heisler/Kvavik discussion of "structured co-optation" (a recurrent phrase) is manifestly relevant for a discussion of realistic models of modern interest politics. If Schmitter's corporatism was new and necessary to move us from the conceptual torpor of pressure group studies (1979 (a), p 5) then it would have been more useful to contrast

this new approach with the latest refinements and developments in State/interest studies than his version of naive pluralism.

In the final report of the SSRC research panel on corporatism and accountability there seems a similiar determination to overlook the pluralist literature (and its critical sub-literature) as being of use in the analysis of the group-department relations. The report speculates that research in this field of bargained relations could, 'partially draw on and largely contribute to social science theory in a number of areas; economic theories of organisational behaviour, game theory and collective action, socio-historical theories of change and evaluation - bureaucratization, incorporation and social control, technological determinism' (p ii). Each and any of those approaches might have something to offer, but it seems odd that the group/pluralist tradition which has directly addressed the topic for fifty years has yielded nothing of interest. The overlooking of the obvious is also evident when the panel advocates (para 3.1.6) further study of agriculture which is described as "under-researched". In fact there are many well regarded studies of the area by Self & Storing (1960) Wilson (1977) and others. No doubt new work, with amended perspectives, would be valuable but the report argues the case for special emphasis on agriculture by ignoring political science contributions.

To date this argument has primarily been directed to the

lack of attention given by the corporatists to literature which preempts their focus on regularised group relations. This follows from their inadequate treatment of pluralism. The pluralist model is presented in a caricature version. The corporatist technique is found not only in the initial Schmitter article, but also in his other 1979 piece (1979 (c)). Once again he pushes forward critics of pluralism to show how palpable are its faults, but apparently unwilling to show how his own contribution relates to their criticisms he argues, "only recently have theorists working from within the paradigm begun to express doubts about the begnity of its outcome (1979 (c), p 79). Of course precisely such points made by Herring date back to 1936, by Truman to 1951, by Dahl to 1956.

Other corporatists have similiarly caricatured pluralism. Thus Newman (1981) reckons pluralists assume "all groupings have equal access to sources of power, and all hold equal ultimate chance for success (p 02). He manages to interpret authors such as Rokkan, Kvavik, Liphart, Heisler, Beer as giving backing to corporatist interpretations.

In his 1979 (c) chapter Schmitter does pose a string of possibilities that seem not implausible. For example, "What if the spread of education...began to produce a fully organised, aware and mobilised polity...?. What if this new 'tautness' resulted in an enormous increase in demands for public allocations, and a concomitant stalemate in the parallelogram of

group influences?. What if the expansion of public policy resulted not in the removal of items from the agenda, but...a consequent reinforcement of mutually exclusive associated demands?. What if the bureaucratic-technical personnel necessary to run the proliferating interest associations and specialised agencies of the state began increasingly to act on professional norms of their own...? ...what might happen or already have happened to the pluralist mode of interest intermediation?" (1979 (c), 79). As Schmitter no doubt intended these questions suggest affirmative answers - there are these tendencies but there is no argument that leads us from recognising problems in advanced pluralism to endorsing Schmitter-type corporatism. In fact most of his problems of pluralism seem to lead to growing fragmentation, disorder, unpredictability - and these are difficult to reconcile with corporatism.

Schmitter concedes that sub-types of pluralism are possible but he does not delineate them so and while pluralism is presented in its rather unsatisfactory fashion of open and equal competition, there is an assymmetry of treatment for corporatism. Schmitter divides corporatism into two forms - state corporatism (as in Portugal, Spain, Brazil, etc.) and societal corporatism and found in Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark and perhaps in emergent fashion in Great Britain, West Germany, France, Canada and the U.S. (1979 (b), p 21).

Social corporatism, that which has more relevance in Western

Europe, has some qualities that make it particularly difficult to distinguish from pluralism

		Social Corporatism
limited number	-	limitation derived from interassociational arrangements and not by government restriction.
singular	-	as a product of co-optation or competitive elimination and not state action
compulsory	-	de facto, through social pressure
non-competitive	-	voluntary rather than state controlled
hierarchically ordered	-	outcome of internal processes rather than state decree
functionally differentiated	-	voluntary agreements of mutual non interference and not by state decisions and direction
recognition by state	-	a matter of political necessity imposed from below

		and not a state concession
representational monopoly	-	similar to above, has been grasped from government and not conceded
controls on leadership selection and interest articulation	-	reciprocal arrangement not imposition

(based on Schmitter, 1979 (b), p 21).

These details of societal corporatism demonstrate that as it is essentially a voluntary, bargained system, it will be difficult to disentangle from some form of pluralism: where is the distinctive role of the State in this pattern?. Relaxing the rigidity of the corporatist formula does make corporatism more plausible (we know few western systems have formal imposed corporatism) but the cost in making corporatism more relevant is again to make it less distinctive.

The practice of concept dilution is not peculiar to Schmitter. Many of those on the band wagon find it necessary to so weaken the concept of corporatism to find it applicable that it is difficult to believe that it is anything more than chic pluralism.

As an example one can examine the 1979 special issue of

Scandinavian Political Studies, which had as its theme "Corporate Pluralism in Nordic Democracies". It is worth observing that this was crammed with data on the relationship between interest organisations and government - and that there is a real need for work in this area. However if one reviews the definitions and terms used through the course of the issue, one discovers that the editor's claim of a "coherent" analytical framework and Nordic tradition in the study of corporate pluralism is suspect (p 195).

The Butski/Johansen paper is offered as a contribution to the scholarly debate on corporatism or corporate pluralism. Through the conclusions of decentralisation and complexity are correctly held not to be in accord with corporatism, there seems no distinction between corporatism and corporate pluralism. Where they claim that one of the most crucial tenets in the literature of corporatism is institutionalised group access and direct group participation in public policy-making, administration and implementation (p 199), it is not explicit if this distinguishes corporate pluralism from corporatism or if they are interchangeable propositions.

While this conceptual imprecision exists, the data and interpretations are invaluable. Following Heisler (1974) and Olsen (1978) they examine the hypothesis that (contrary to that of Schmitter and his co-authors) predominantly narrow technical, divisible and measurable questions fit best into the bargaining

process and compromises of the corporate structure. It is found that specific regulation is the cause of external group participation in government.

Directly addressing the Schmitter formulation, Butski and Johansen conclude that direct organisational participation in government is not restricted to a small number of interest groups. They argue that corporate structures and practices go hand in hand with a system of myriad groups and a decentralised structure. Perhaps it would be preferable to leave corporatism depicting that orderly pattern presented by Schmitter and categorise this empirically derived pattern as corporate pluralism.

Helander's discussion of Norway similarly contradicts the editors claim of a coherent use of corporate pluralism. The term is not used in the account of interest representatives in the Finnish committee system. Instead Helander claims to be writing about corporatization - which meant, "that interest organisations continually participate in the making of authorative decisions" (p 221). No attempt is made to differ between Schmitter (1979 (b) and Lehmbruch's 1979 (b)) corporatisms and Kvavik's (1976) corporate pluralism (p 222). The danger of using so diluted a definition of corporatism along the lines of "continually participate in the making of authorative decisions" is that much pluralist interest has been inspired precisely by the recognition of such participation.

The same issue of dilution arises in Hernes and Selvik's article on "Local Corporatism in Norway". There they recognise that Rokkan's focus was corporate pluralism, but this they compact with corporatism which they loosley define as, "a system of interest intermediation between organised groups, particularly in the economic area, and the state apparatus". (p 261). Christensen and Egeberg's contribution on "Organised Group - Government Relations in Norway" again does not use the term corporate pluralism, but they retain a stable sense of Schmitter's corporatism. While they see <u>some</u> corporatist-like tendencies - segmentation, some hierarchy, overall they see the pattern as too complex to be adequately captured by the corporatist model.

In Martin Heisler's "Corporate Pluralism Revisited: Where is the Theory?" he starts from the position (adopted in this review) that there is an issue which had orginally been given insufficient prominence in pluralist writings, but had been brought out by Beer (1966), Rokkan (1966), McConnell (1966) and Lowi (1969) - the <u>structured</u>, <u>regularised</u> participation of organised interests in policy making (p 277). Heisler certainly doesn't regard corporate pluralism as a cure for all our difficulties in making sense of modern trends, but he is very effective in arguing that whatever the final shape of the solution it won't look much like corporatism, (as used by Schmitter). He argues, for example,

"when their work (empirical scholars) is viewed as a whole (it has)... shown that corporate pluralism - at least in the Nordic countries, for which large bodies of data have been accumulated - is immensely complex, multifarious and polycentric; its norms are characterised by heterodoxy; the actor's motives are often unarticulated (and sometimes perhaps inarticulable), as well as ad hoc or opportunistic... Thus while it would be an exaggeration to say that empirical studies of corporate pluralism in the aggregate depict a system near chaos, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the relatively parsimonious model of societal corporatism provided by Schmitter et al, imputes a degree of order far greater than that uncovered at least by those who have intensively studied the Nordic cases in the past few years". (pp 284-5).

Corporate pluralism is then a description of the problem rather than a theory of causation. It is a statement to the effect that there are patterns of regularity, but that there is a growing number of active groups which introduce uncertainty and disorder to the system. But a mere statement of the problem is more useful than a theory which fails to connect to observable reality.

In the Scandiavian Political Studies special issue, the apparent uniformity of the essays concealed some contributors describing Nordic practice as corporatism and others as the

rejection of corporatism.

Many other sources of diluted corporatism can be cited. Lehmbruch in his first chapter in the 1979 collection prefers as his term "liberal corporatism" (1979 (a), p 55). This concept is differentiated from traditional pre-industrial corporatism. It is not explicitly linked to Schmitter's societal corporatism, but appears to have some similarities. Lehmbruch stresses the large measure of constitutional autonomy of the groups and the voluntary nature of the integration of conflicting social groups (p 54). The distinguishing trait of "liberal corporatism" is given as the high degree of corporatism among the groups themselves in shaping public policy and the existence of two levels of bargaining. Firstly bargaining occurs within the autonomous groups, then the bargaining shifts to exchanges between the government and the 'cartel' of organised groups (p 54).

Not only is this concept of liberal democracy less demanding in its criteria than Schmitter's corporatism, it is in Lehmbruch's hands less manic in its geographical scope and his 'future trends' for his weaker model are more pessimistic than Schmitter's forecasts for 'societal corporatism'. In short Lehmbruch's work - appearing along with Schmitter's - appears to give credence to the latter - but there is in fact little in the Austria case to encourage Schmitter.

Lehmbruch, like Schmitter, has a second chapter in the collection. Like Schmitter he guarantees some consistency by

largely repeating definitions. He does make one claim that is worth accentuating - "It is precisely because of the intimate mutual penetration of state bureaux and large interest organisations that the traditional concept of 'interest representation' becomes quite inappropriate for a theoretical understanding of corporatism" (p 150). Such a working use of corporatism is arguably, not distinctively corporatist.

As another example of soft corporatism we can look at Alan Cawson's model (Cawson 1982 pp 39-40). He contrasts pluralism with a corporatist model of policy-making where, representation (of demands) and implementation (of policies) are fixed within a mutually dependent bargaining relationship in which favourable policy outcomes are traded for co-operation and expertise. He stresses the bargaining relationship (distinguishing it from incorporation and co-optation). If we return to Grant's question, "Does Neo-Corporatism Tell Us Anything We Didn't Know Already?", one can answer that a work such as Cawson's could emerge from a close reading of the traditional literature - "Policy-making in a corporate society is thus a complex process of bargaining and negotiation between the state and corporate groups". (Cawson, 1982, p 41). Other than his emphasis on bargaining, Cawson is also perhaps un-Schmitter like with his image of a "fragmented state" (Chapter 4) and when he sees even individual companies as the effective units in government/industry relations (p 37). Is there anything here that is not corporate pluralism?

Looking for a term to label the trends they identify many authors have grasped at the term "corporatism". For example - their discussion of public-private conveyance, Nachmias and Greer (Policy Sciences, vol 14, No 2) find new partnerships and alliances organised by areas of functional interdependence. They self consciously, and at length, adopt Schmitter's corporatism to describe this phenomenon. It is however difficult to imagine they seriously wish to lumber their description of governing boards with the baggage of Schmitter's formula.

If such low level definitions of corporatism are to be allowed an awful lot of corporatism is going to be found - but without endorsing the Schmitter approach. While neo corporatists once complained that... "some schemes have carelessly characterised virtually any and all initimate interest group - state relations which have been accepted as legitimate as corporatist" (Panitch 1979, p 123), it is difficult to see that a much more rigorous and technical use is now in force.

Thus Lehmbruch warned in 1979, "... liberal corporatism should not be confounded with simply more consultation and co-operation of government with organised interest groups..." (1979, p 150) yet in the volume he edited in 1982 several of the case studies seem to make no more demands than this.

The SSRC Research Panel on Corporatism and Accountability identified the development of the Engineering Council in Britain as a promising case for corporatist research. Schmitter (1982, p

265) does see professional licensing as one of the fields prone to corporatism. The Engineering Council case does have some of the features that interest corporatists, but so varied and imprecise are the corporatist criteria it is difficult to say which of the many options that emerged in the engineering case was more or less corporatist.

If one looks at corporatist criteria (as for example the 13 points set out by Schmitter in Grant (1983)) each and everyone is impossible to relate without argument to the Engineering Council. (A full description of the engineering example would overwhelm this review of corporatism, but is available in Jordan and Richardson, 1983).

To ask exactly what a corporatist Engineering Council would look like is no doubt to be insular, introspective and inward looking (Grant, 1983, p 41). If it is parochial trivial to find that corporatism doesn't exist in Britain (Grant, 1983, p 12), then presumably to look at one British institution is beneath contempt. Apparently "The real value of corporatism is in the study of corporative government where modes of interest intermediation or specific policy arrangements may usefully be characterised as more or less corporatist. The position of Britain along any such continuum of relatively minor importance" (Grant, 1983, p 12). It is odd that a tool can be useful in locating the corporatist positions of several politics, but is not to be used for the simpler discussion of one country.

This point highlights a change that is going on, the matter of "what is neo-corporatism for?". In the earlier work countries were by and large corporatist. (See Schmitter 1979 (b), p 19). In the original use corporatism replaced pluralism as an effective summary description of political systems - as for example in Schmitter's portrayal of "the decay of pluralism and its gradual displacement by societal corporatism" (1979 (b), p 24). In the early Schmitter social corporatism is "found" (p 22). He argued that while no empirically extant system of interest intermediation may perfectly reproduce or replicate corporatism pluralism (or syndicalism) sets of observable, institutionally descriptive traits tend to cohere making it possible to categorise historically specific systems (or parts of systems). Again this is broadly stating that there are largely corporatist systems to be found (1979 (c), p 65).

By his 1982 article it is conspicuous that Schmitter labels no particular and specific region as corporatist (in this the volume which he claims is about an empirical focus on corporatism).

Corporatism has retreated (in the size of claims made) as it has advanced (in terms of widespread adoption). In this more guarded version corporatism no longer is, but, "For definitional purposes it may be preferable to define concepts in terms of polar opposites... but the real world is almost always located somewhere in between" (1982, p 265). "Corporatism, however

defined and however preceded by adjectives, is clearly not something a polity has or does not have" (1982, p 264-5). Where now the confident categorisation in the 1979 volume which found, by and large, corporatism from Sweden to Yugoslavia to Peru?.

Now corporatism is not presented as descriptive but the ideal type end of some continuum, this is more realistic but it cannot be disproved. But if it only ever was intended as some ideal type unrelated to the somewhere in betweens of the real world, the concept would not have generated so much excitement.

Frank Wilson's (1982) article on French pressure groups and state relations presents useful data but is yet another example of how the corporatist ideal type is difficult to use because corporatism is diluted and the definitional criteria are difficult to disentangle. If one contrasts his two most useful models of interest intermediation - pluralism and corporatism, it is difficult to see how the criteria help us discriminate between types of systems.

Attitudes of group leaders in:

Pluralism

(1) a perception of a well-defined boundary line between influence-wielding by groups and policy making by government;

(2) a well-developed consensus on the means of government decision making although not necessarily on its objectives;

(3) a tolerance of diversity and plurality among autonomous groups;

(4) a sense that the decision-making process is open to influence from interest groups;

(5) an expectation of some success through dialogue with government and other interests;

(6) a generally positive attitude toward participation in the political process;

(7) a perception that groups can and ought to participate in shaping government policy;

(8) a sense that the inequalities that exist in this form of interest representation stem from a group's lack of resources.

Corporatism

(1) a rejection of the notion of a boundary between interest-group activity and the policy-making process;

(2) an acceptance of a well-developed consensus on the means and ends of government;

(3) a desire for unity and cohesion within interest sectors;

(4) a sense that the interest groups should have and actually do have an important and even dominant role in decision making;

(5) an expectation that their interests will be reflected in the government's official policy decisions;

(6) a conviction that participation in the political process is

essential even mandatory;

(7) a sense that the purpose of their interaction with the State is to participate directly in writing government policy;

(8) a feeling that inequalities in the system of representation do not exist since all legitimate and representative groups are involved.

While the criteria might be reasonably discrete, it is practice almost impossible to apply them. For example how do we tell in practice if there is consensus on ends as well as means (item 2)?. Is the situation one of positive attitudes to participation or where it is essential (item 6)?. Do groups feel they ought to participate in shaping government policy or that they are participating directly in writing policy (item 7)?.

Another aspect of the retreat of the corporatists concerns the new emphasis on advancing corporatism as having mainly sectoral relevance. Grant seems to wish to defend corporatism from those who wish to see it fitting at single country level, (a) by arguing that it is a concept for intra country comparision (b) it is found in sectors of single countries.

This latter argument what might be termed curate's egg corporatism - seems to appeal to several authors with an instinct for academic intermediation. Diamant (1981) for one accepts this view and Schmitter himself now proposes that "Practices resembling the corporatist model are quite unevenly distributed across issue arenas" (1982, p 265). One must note that this

corporatism in sectors is much more limited than "the whole gesalt or syndrome" discussed in 1979 (Schmitter, p 14). The level of sectorised corporatism is somewhat more modest than the banner of a system of interest intermediation that was repeatedly flown in the 1979 volume.

The sort of explanations that might be appropriate to account for the development of close interest group departmental relations in one sector might be very different from those hypothecated for a system of corporatism. As one of the many puzzles corporatist pseudo theory presents us, it is interesting to see which kind of sector might be especially prone to corporatisation. Thus Lehmbruch (1979 p 152) sees organised agriculture as, "less frequently included (in corporatist schemes) and when participating apparently have no decisive voice. Hence they remain largely confined to the classical pluralist "pressure politics". Schmitter (at least by 1982) on the contrary found agriculture as showing a marked propensity for corporatism (1982, p 265). Does one have to be an intellectual skinhead to find this all rather unsatisfactory?.

Wyn Grant argues that for all the expressions of scepticism the verdict on corporatism, "isn't in yet (p 39)". By coincidence Alfred Diamant ends his review of corporatism and related issues by observing it was hardly the in exorable pattern suggested by some. Like Grant (but from the opposite point of view) he observed that, Not all the returns are in on the

"century of corporatism". A few precincts are yet to be heard". (See Diamant, 1981). If the Nordic countries, to name but a few, have been considered corporatist, it is also time for a recount.

There is, in conclusion, a subject still worthy of discussion. It has been termed by Olsen (1981) "Integrated organisational participation in government". One suspects that this is what excites the interest of many of those in the corporatist cohort: it attracts, and has done so for many decades, many who manage to study the phenomenon from a basically pluralist position. As the corporatists in the more modern times of the 1980's now realise this integrated participation is hardly likely to match up to Schmitter style (1979 vintage) corporatism. The actual characteristics of these current practices might be usefully thrown in relief by the corporatist ideal type. To that extent the corporatist literature is to be welcomed, but it is a pity it has been so negative about other approaches. Criticism of the inadequate exposition of the corporatist model (and its promiscuous use) does not argue that there is not a subject deserving of study.

Footnote

(1) This paper is a development of argument originally given to a Strathclyde seminar and published as "Iron Triangles, Woolly Corporatism and Elastic Nets" in Journal of Public Policy 1981, No 1. The paper largely in this current form was presented to the Department of Politics at Oslo in September 1982 and draws on a bibliographical chapter on the earlier group literature to be published as "Group Approaches to the Study of Politics" in a bibliographical source book edited by G Drewry and D Englefield for Butterworths. Certain elements of the article have been overtaken by Ross Martin, "Pluralism and the New Corporatism", Political Studies, XXXl, pp 86-102. Both Martin and myself are making the point that the corporatists have failed to give a reasonable account of the pluralism they seek to challenge.

In a recent review article on Berger's Organizing Interests in Western Europe ('Corporatism, Pluralism and Professsional Memory', World Politics Vol XXV, No 2, 1983). Gabriel Almond makes the same point in connection with Berger et al that is made here about Schimtter, Iehmbruch et al. He notes, "The casualness of the search of the earlier literature and the distortion of its contents are serious weaknesses in an otherwise important contribution to the interest groups literature" (p 252).

(2) Though Schmitters main article dates back to 1974, citations here (and for some other authors) are to the more accessible

1979 source (Schmitter and Lehmbruch).

(3) This section is drawn from the above mentioned bibliographical review.

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