STRATHCLYDE PAPERS ON GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

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Abstract

Consultation amounting to negotiation within policy communities has been identified as the normal British 'policy style' by Jordan and Richardson, though they do recognise deviations from that style. This paper, while accepting that British policy-making often involves discussions between specialised sets of governmental and interest group actors, suggests that the concept of a 'normal' British policy style hinders understanding at least as much as it helps it. There are also problems about whether the appropriate level of analysis is 'policy sectors', departments, or 'policy communities'. This paper suggests that rather than trying to define a normal pattern, it would be more illuminating to identify the contingencies underlying the various different methods of processing issues which are manifested in British policy-making. A preliminary categorization is offered which locates 'consultation' as one of a number of sets of styles, but one which itself contains so much variety in terms of role of government, number of interest groups, and relative weighting of interest groups, that to conflate the variety under the single heading of 'consultation' hinders understanding more than it contributes to it.

1. Sectorization, Departments and Policy Communities

This paper is primarily concerned with the extent to which 'consultation' is a useful concept for describing how issues are processed in British policy-making at central government level. In particular it is concerned to explore whether consultation amounting to negotiation constitutes a distinctive British 'policy style' as Jordan and Richardson have argued.(1) Before doing so, it is necessary to explore the ideas of the sectorization of policy-making and of policy communities with which the concepts of consultation and negotiation are inextricably intertwined. This exploration is hampered by an ambiguity in the literature about whether the focus is on broad policy areas or sectors, the remit of government departments, or more tightly focussed policy communities. Each has a plausible justification as a focus for the analysis of policy-making, but we should be concerned if argument slides from one to the other.

In talking of the 'sectorization of policy-making' Jordan and Richardson appear to be equating it to the remit of departments. A departmental focus is of interest, because as Jordan and Richardson point out 'almost inevitably ministers tend to act as departmental spokesmen', and as fighting their corner for public expenditure.(2) Departments are the institutional focus for interdepartmental activity at political level. However, it is worth noting that some of the early uses of the concept

of 'policy community' stressed the interdepartmental nature of the community as a focus of analysis.(3) Although sectorization is discussed in terms of departments by Jordan and Richardson, the term 'policy sector' is later used.(4) But departmental sector is not an identical concept to that of policy area. Though the picture is far from being a neat one, increasingly since the 1950s broad policy areas have been reflected in the coverage of single, large Whitehall departments.(5) However, 'policy as a label' does not necessarily produce exclusive and self-contained areas. An issue might be labelled as a poverty problem or a housing one, a health problem or a social work one. Some policy areas are intrinsically overlapping, such as industrial policy, trade policy and foreign policy. Further, there has been a trend towards strengthening of the territorial Scottish and Welsh departments, so that they are involved in a large number of domestic policy areas.

What constitutes a policy area is not necessarily self-evident or self-defining. However, in looking at commonsense labels, such as health, defence, agriculture, and so on, we can find differences in characteristics between policy areas and a degree of shared characteristics within them. For example, most health policy issues, whether concerned with hospitals, dental treatment, or pharmacies, have a number of characteristics which they share, including the involvement of professions and

quasi-professions and a type of policy output which involves the delivery of goods and services to individual citizens. Similarly, social security involves the provision of cash benefits, whether in respect of children or old age pensioners. Both health and social security policy differ in turn from defence as a policy area. Policy areas vary considerably in the extent to which central government departments are the executant bodies: social security and defence are both executed by central government, health policy through a structure of appointed boards, and school education through elected local authorities. We would expect that these differences might be reflected in the politics surrounding different policy areas. For example, professional bodies are important in health care but much less significant in social security policy; defence policy is likely to be much more a matter for internal processing by government rather than domestic interest groups.

In addition to nature of employee, nature of output and nature of target population, international interpenetration is a factor in variation between policy areas. Two broad forms of international penetration can be identified. First, there is interaction arising from international institutions of which Britain is a member, such as NATO or the European Communities, or through a process of direct governmental bargaining with other governments or foreign bodies. Here the British government is explicitly involved in taking decisions, but not

unilaterally. This type of interaction is most obviously relevant to defence and foreign affairs, but applies to an increasingly wide range of domestic policy areas, such as agriculture, particularly through our membership of the European Communities. The second type of interpenetration reflects the varying permeability of domestic policy areas to outside influences which are not the direct result of decisions by the British government in conjunction with other governments. No domestic policy area is totally insulated, but clearly policy areas such as social security and health are much less directly impacted than energy policy, which is affected by international prices and supply of a number of internationally traded fuels.

Policy areas and departments vary according to the extent of 'openness' to direct domestic pressures outside government and in the extent of openness to international pressures. Defence policy is relatively closed to domestic pressures outside government, but is fundamentally subject to international penetration. For departments with a low degree of international interpenetration the occasional international repercussions of their actions may be neglected (e.g. fees for overseas students), and the international negotiating aspects of their work (outside the European Communities at least) may be mediated through the Foreign Office rather than directly.

In Governing under Pressure Richardson and Jordan describe policy communities as operating at departmental

level.(6) Gustaffson and Richardson state that 'Each policy sector (or policy area) is populated by a "policy community" and these communities usually operate relatively independently of each other.'(7) However, in their 1982 chapter on the British policy style, Jordan and Richardson suggest that much of the political processing of issues takes place not at the level of policy area or department, but in more delimited 'policy communities':

> It is, therefore, perhaps more realistic to see a 'policy community' existing at the level of detail covered by a civil service assistant or under-secretary - rather than at departmental level. Each policy sector may contain several policy communities . . . Thus, there will be many linkages between the various policy communities in each sector (for example, between branches of medicine, social services and social policy), and no doubt overlapping memberships. But there will also be some linkages between sectors (for example, between the health and higher education sector and between the education and labour market sectors).(8)

Indeed, a diagram in Jordan and Richardson show some communities straddling sectoral boundaries. Although the existence of linkages between communities is mentioned, the forms which these linkages take are not spelled out, including the relationship of departmental politicians and

of permanent secretaries to the communities and the mechanisms for resolving priorities and disputes for communities covered by the same departments. There seems, then, to be a gap between the analysis of regular consultation between civil servants and interest groups at policy community level and the top participants at sectoral level. The relative significance of 'sectorization' at policy area or departmental level and policy communities as a narrower focus is ambiguous.

Even within one department there may be considerable variation in whether there are clearly separate communities or clearly interacting ones. We can retain the idea of a policy area, where it does not coincide with departmental boundaries, as patterns of overlap and frequent interaction by members of policy communities, as well as pointing to objective interactions, such as those between schools and universities, and to similarities which make it administratively convenient to group communities together.

The argument that communities are where issues are processed is considered extensively in later sections. In particular, we will be considering whether it is possible to identify a 'normal' style of processing issues in communities by consultation amounting to negotiation between central government and other members of the community. The discussion above of differences between policy areas would lead us to expect some differences between communities in the way in which issues are

processed at one point in time.(9) We might also expect to find some variations in processing over time between individual ministers and between individual parties and prime ministers. Processing affecting a particular policy may vary over a longer time span. For example, Edward Boyle, who was Education Secretary in the early 1960s, remarked how self-contained the work of his department was.(10) By the mid 1980s, however, education policy had become much more intertwined with training policy and, to a lesser extent, industrial policy. Such variations may occur within a pattern of continuing or recurring features.

Those who point to the importance of policy communities do not argue that the concept is of uniform or universal applicability. Sharpe points out that 'The communities vary in strength, influence and composition since some public services, for various reasons, are better suited to attracting a policy community than others'; he also notes that policy communities are not always able to present a united front to the outside world.(11) Policy communities (or 'subgovernments') can be contrasted with more open 'policy networks' in which many interests are represented more evenly than the closed set of participants in communities.(12) Jordan and Richardson, while arguing that there is a 'normal' style of negotiating within communities, note that policies with major financial implications are less suitable for 'in sector' treatment, that some issues such as defence and foreign affairs do not

involve much organized group deliberation, that some issues such as some manifesto commitments are regarded as 'non-negotiable', and that Parliament as a whole does play an important role on some moral and constitutional issues.(13) Jordan and Richardson nevertheless stress similiarities between the processing of some of these types of issues and processing through communities and regard them as deviations from a norm of negotiation through policy communities.

The concepts of sectors and communities are helpful in stressing the disaggregated nature of much policy processing in contrast to the 'conventional' focus on different political institutions such as Parliament and Cabinet. However, it is important not to exaggerate or over-generalize the extent of self-containment of policy communities. The cabinet system in Britain certainly does not provide a 'rational' centralized mechanism whereby all important issues are pulled in for discussion and decision-making in full cabinet.(14) Decisions may be taken within single government departments, and even interdepartmental mechanisms such as cabinet committees may simply be the institutionalization of policy communities or sectors which cross-cut departmental boundaries. However, on some issues ministers, especially the prime minister, who are not full members of the relevant policy community, may be involved in decision-making. Thus there is a degree of integration within the British executive which does

provide some counter-balance to the view of the policy process as being segmented into sectors.

Although the conventional wisdom on the budgetary process in Britain and elsewhere is correct in arguing that the consideration of individual programmes is often highly particularistic and incremental in relation to existing allocations, the arguments about these individual allocations do take place in the context of economic policy and policy about public expenditure decision-making.(15) This emphasizes that public policy-making does have an aggregate and to a certain extent 'integrative' dimension, as well as a sectoral one. Public expenditure constraints also form part of the background and sometimes foreground consideration of options at the agenda processing and government decision-making stages of the process. Thus the study of budgeting gives us some idea of the changing priorities of government <u>as a whole</u>. Jordan and Richardson recognize that policies with major financial implications are by their nature less suitable for 'in sector' treatment. This does seem to constitute a very important limitation.

It is certainly not suggested here that the approach to studying public policy embodied in the ideas of segmentation and policy communities should be abandoned. Rather their potential usefulness may be increased if the level of analysis at which they operate is clarified and if variation in the degree of self-containment of communities

is recognized.

2. The main categories of processing

Consultation as the 'norm'

Consultation is a pervasive (though not universal) feature of the policy process in Britain. However, to describe consultation as the 'norm' could be misleading in two ways. First, it implies that other forms of processing are in some sense deviant, whereas they may in fact be the normal way of processing certain types of issues; it is more useful to try to identify the factors underlying variation rather than to focus on one pattern which is actually 'abnormal' for some kinds of issues.

Issues on the political agenda in Britain are processed in a variety of different ways, though some are clearly more common than others. Table 1 lists the main categories of processing in approximately descending order of the extent of central government direction to the process. Given the variety of different forms of processing, it is difficult to separate out changes across time (for example, whether the Thatcher government has a distinctive style) from differences which may exist at any given time. The government and individual ministers will vary substantially in the extent to which they have clear objectives for particular policy areas. However, this variation across time and between ministers has to confront continuing 'objective' features, such as whether affected

Table 1 Main types of processing

Imposition
Internalized within government
Processable through consultation (see Table 2)
Policy emerges from practice
Non-internalizable

interests can effectively exercize a potential veto over the implementation of government policies.

Secondly, 'consultation' covers an extremely wide range of practices, both in terms of the number of organizations being consulted and in terms of the role of government in taking and implementing decisions after consultations (see Table 2). Table 2 has two dimensions. The first, shown by the column headings, indicates the government's role in consulting these participants. The second, shown by the rows in the table, indicates the number of participants. Some combinations, such as open consultation and corporatism, are logically impossible or highly unlikely.(16) Consultation can range from cosmetic ritual to meaningful bargaining between government and group. Given the variety of relationships which can be covered by the word 'consultation', this does raise the question whether like other terms (often with value

Table 2 Processable through consultation

Participants	Role of government in consulting			
	Referee	Corporatist	Negotiate	Cosmetic
			a. principle	
			b. details	
Policy community				
1. Single (recognized) group				
2. Multiple groups				
(a) multilateral discussions				
(b) serial bilateral		X		
Cross-community				
'Open' consultation		X		
1. Government initiated				
2. Blown open		X		

connotations) which are subject to a number of interpretations, such as 'democracy' or 'representative' it has become a word which of itself conveys little substantive meaning (i.e. is empty of content as a word). To adapt a phrase used by Wildavsky about planning, 'If consultation is everything, maybe it's nothing'.(17) Accordingly, it will be necessary to 'unpack' the concept of consultation, and this is done in the next section, after reviewing styles other than consultation in this section.

Imposition

On some issues the government may seek to impose its policy, without having to bargain away any aspects of its preferred policy. A precondition of this style is, of course, that the government already has a clearly worked out policy of its own. A second precondition is that the government actually has the power to implement its preferred policy. In practice, the issue of objective constraints is far from clear-cut, since the potential veto power or obstructive capacity of opponents is in part a matter of perception, and governments may be able to overcome opposition if they are prepared to bear the financial costs and political risks, as with the 1984-5 miners strike. The Anglo-Irish agreement of 1985 was arrived at without consultation of representatives of the

majority community, though the minority community was indirectly consulted through its links with the government of the Irish republic. However, because on many issues there are groups whose opinion matters in political debate and which may control information and other resources needed by government, the opportunities for outright policy imposition are limited.(18) Even where the government could unilaterally achieve what it wants, it may deliberately choose to engage in consensus building.

Internalized within Whitehall

Some issues are processed in a way that is relatively internalized within Whitehall, that is with relatively limited participation by interest groups in the discussions by civil servants and ministers which lead to the decision. This is true of a number of aspects of foreign affairs and defence and of some aspects of economic policy. Here the policy process does involve discussions within Whitehall, but with little or no direct participation by groups, though their views and anticipated reactions and those of Parliament may provide part of the background taken into account in considering the options. Jordan and Richardson recognize this insofar as they recognize 'internalised policy-making' as one of a number of 'Trends within the "policy community" pattern'.(19) It is argued here that such decisions are sufficiently important in scale and number and sufficiently distinctive in style to be regarded

as a separate style of policy-making rather than a 'trend within policy communities'.

It is not being argued here that foreign and defence policy themselves have a uniform style. Indeed when we examine foreign policy-making more closely we can see the merit of differentiating between styles, since some foreign policy-mkaing is clearly quite distinctive from most domestic policy, while other decisions much more closely resemble domestic policy communities. Developments in trade, economics, defence, research, immigration, and the wide range of concerns of international organizations of which Britain is a member have all served to blur the distinction between foreign and domestic policy.(20) However, while this does means an increasing role for groups in providing an input on issues with an international dimension, it has not led to a total fragmentation of international issues into sectors or communities. Rather, one consequence of this blurring and the linking of different issues with a foreign dimension has been to push issues increasingly towards the centre in the sense of the network of interdepartmental committees and the Cabinet Office.(21) Foreign and defence policy also involve different implementation considerations from most aspects of domestic policy.(22) As was noted in section 1, the varying openness of different domestic policy sectors is itself a source of variations in the way policies are processed.

Foreign policy-making, while it may impinge on the concerns of domestic policy communities, cannot be analysed in terms of a policy community whose settled membership and relative autonomy from other aspects of government provides government decision-makers with a degree of predictability about the actions and reactions of non-government actors. As Wallace points out:

> in the extent to which governmental actors are involved in situations which they neither fully understand nor control, foreign policy-making differs in degree from most areas of domestic policy-making. Shared values and assumptions, long experience of dealing with each other, and a common acceptance of certain written and unwritten rules of the game make it possible for ministers and officials responsible for health services or education to deal with doctors' or teachers' organizations with a reasonable degree of certainty about their reactions to various proposals and a reasonable expectation that third parties will not directly intrude into this relationship. In foreign policy, even when a clear decision has been taken, unexpected responses from foreign governments, the interaction of a specific relationship with wider international developments, may rapidly outdate the policy decided upon or force the reopening of

> a settled question. Such a degree of uncertainty, it may be suggested, obtains in domestic matters only in economic and industrial policy.(23)

Urgent matters or crises, not allowing time for preliminary work at lower levels are also more common in foreign affairs than in domestic politics.(24) Two additional features of foreign and defence policy also serve to reduce the scope for informed public debate and influence by groups. The first is the government's relative freedom from the need to gain parliamentary sanction. Secondly and relatedly, foreign and defence matters have been subject to even greater secrecy than domestic ones.

Not all aspects of foreign policy-making have the same features and same types of participants; there can, for example, be important differences between overseas aid, defence and security, and foreign economic and commercial policy. Wallace suggests that foreign policy can be divided into three layers.(25) First, there are 'high policy' issues - those seen by policy-makers as affecting Britain's fundamental standing in the world. The bottom layer consists of 'low policy issues' - those in which few political values and few domestic issues are seen to be at stake; for example, detailed and routine transactions between friendly governments, regular conversations with distant countries, technical agreements on matters to which governments attach little political significance. High and low policy issues are both seen as largely matters for the

executive, that is ministers and officials, though except for crises there may be constraints from party and interest groups. However, for the middle layer of 'sectoral policy' issues - those that are perceived as affecting only certain sections of society - the involvement of groups outside the executive is considerably greater.

High policy issues closely involve the prime minister and the senior members of the cabinet as well as senior officials of the Cabinet Office and the major departments. In crises, decisions are likely to be taken by the prime minister and a very small group of ministerial colleagues and official advisers. On other issues, such as joining the European Communities, the debate may widen. Peak organizations such as the TUC and the CBI are likely to be consulted. There may be widespread debate among the public and in Parliament, but the outcome is likely to be settled within the cabinet structure (it is important to distinguish between wide debate and wide participation in decision-making or decision influence). Decisions about Britain's nuclear deterrent are good examples of decisions taken within the executive, often in conditions of secrecy. By contrast, the decision about remaining in the European Communities was finally determined not by the executive, but not by 'policy communities' either - unusually, it went to a referendum.

Sectoral issues involve senior officials and in most cases departmental ministers. Issues involving several

departments are overseen by a cabinet committee and by a parallel steering committee of officials. Here the interest groups are the sectoral organizations concerned with the particular area of policy; for example, on issues concerning tariffs and quotas for cotton goods, the various textile associations and some sections of the aid lobby. In foreign affairs as in domestic politics, on some issues there are countervailing groups, in some single interests, in some reinforcing multiple groups. Parliamentary interest in sectoral issues in foreign policy, when raised, tends to be at the level of the interested backbench committees rather than of the parties as a whole, and views frequently cross party lines.

Many of the details of external relations, such as a request for aid from a particular African country are handled almost entirely within the exective, and then at a relatively junior level (first secretaries and counsellors in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and principals and assistant secretaries in home departments), with senior officials and ministers being only intermittently involved.

There are differences between the processing of defence policy issues and other foreign policy matters. Because of its cost, defence is much more closely constrained by the budgetary process, and as a result subjected to a regular and detailed scrutiny which does not apply in most other areas of external policy.(26) The cost and lengthening lead time of defence equipment have led to

a more explictly planning approach in defence policy than in most areas of foreign or domestic policy, though this has not prevented continuing problems of delay and cost escalation, as with the Nimrod early warning radar system in the mid 1980s. Wallace argues that it is difficult to discern anything resembling a military-industrial complex in Britain in the sense of a powerful lobby linking the armed services with defence industries, pressing for a larger defence effort and a security-oriented foreign policy.(27) The relationship between government and industry is close on procurement matters, but the Ministry of Defence appears to have the decisive say.

Foreign policy, then, cannot itself be characterized as having a single 'policy style'. For a range of sectoral issues dealing with the international dimension of domestic interests the processing of issues will be similar to consultation in policy communities, though the overlapping nature of issues with an international dimension is likely to pull many of them into interdepartmental committees rather than allow them to be dealt with solely within separate sectors. For a number of high and low policy issues, however, the processing of the issue will be handled largely within the executive, with little direct consultation of groups. Relatively internalized processing is not confined to foreign and defence policy but also applies to some aspects of economic policy.

Policy emerging from practice

For a number of policies which gradually evolve over time at grass-roots level, it may be inappropriate to identify the process as one of explicit consideration at national level during the crucial stages of development. Rather the situation is one where policy emerges from practice. Such development may take place within the framework of existing legislation or be subsequently facilitated or endorsed by central govenment decision, but the crucial stages of development take place through practice at the point of delivery, with dissemination of ideas through professional links including those between professionals in different local authorities, between members of the same profession in the private and public sectors, and between those at local level and those in central government bodies.(28) Consultation between central government and groups or local authority associations may take place but are not the central shaping feature in evolving policy.

Non-internalizable issues

A number of issues are in practice non-internalizable in the sense of not being suitable for negotiation and compromise among Whitehall departments or between departments and groups. This can arise in two ways. The first is the all-or-nothing type of issue often on moral or constitutional issues, where there is limited room for compromise and strong feelings on both sides, often within

the governing party. In such cases, government is normally happy that issues shold be processed by such methods as Parliamentary decision or a referendum, since there is limited scope for arriving at a generally accepted result through bargaining with groups. On issues which involve both commercial interests and value issues, such as Sunday trading, the government can face difficulties in trying to force its legislation through parliament. It is worth noting that on the Shops Bill, on which the government was defeated at Second Reading in the Commons in 1986, it was MPs rather than the government who determined that this was an issue of principle to be resolved on the floor of the Commons rather than by discussion between government departments and interest groups.

A second category of non-internalizable issues is where attempts at bargaining break down, as when there is failure to agree or renew an incomes policy with trades unions. In such cases government has to decide whether to seek to impose a policy or abandon the search for one.

The relatively peripheral role of Parliament, both committees and the floor of the Commons, at the agenda processing stage on most issues can be underlined by asking what is in it for departments and interest groups if Parliament became a major participant at this stage. While interest groups may find Parliament a useful supplementary line of communication and pressure, those with a close relationship with their departments will be unlikely to

welcome public scrutiny of the process of consultation. However, this arrangment, particularly where consultation amounts to negotiation, is dependent on the government's ability to deliver on its side of a bargain. A period of minority or loose coalition government might remove that assumption and open up the potential for an increased role for Parliament in exploring policy options. Again, this emphasizes the importance of identifying the contingencies underlying different ways of processing policies.

3. Government roles in consultation

In the last section it was argued that consultation covered a wide range of practices. This wide range of practices has been explored empirically and analysed by Jordan and Richardson (29). This section discusses the different roles of government in consultation, while section 4 looks at the implications of differences in the number of non-governmental participants (see Table 2).

Government as referee

Where the government has no clear policy goal, it may act as a referee.(30) Rather than being a direct 'combatant', the government is open to competing group bids, though it may prefer the groups themselves to arrive at a consensus and may facilitate the emergence of such a consensus. An example of an issue on which the government had no strong views of its own and acted as a referee was the proposal to

change the date at which car registration prefix letters were changed each year. The old system (itself switched in 1967 from January at the request of the industry) provided for the change to be made in August of each year. The change of letter led to a bunching of car sales in August each year, during the holiday period for both British car manufacturers and dealers. One consequence was to provide an opportunity for foreign car manufacturers, for whom it was the poorest sales month on the continent, to import cars to meet the seasonal bulge in demand in Britain. The government did have an interest in changing he system, since the Department of Transport's centre in Swansea was unable to cope with the 370,000 registrations, over 20 per cent of the annual total, in August, when staff holidays were at their peak. By November 1985 both motor manufacturers and dealers were split on the options, which included abolishing an annual letter change date, reverting to a change in January, and switching to October. Police and consumer protection organizations favoured the retention of an annual letter change. In March 1986 the government announced that from 1987 the annual changeover date would be switched to October. Here consultation is clearly taking place, with the views of groups being the prime determinant of the policy outcome, but it is different from the type of process involved when the government does have a view of its own on the issue.

Corporatism

Corporatism is a term with rather more meanings that there are people who have written about it.(31) The term is at times used so loosely that it would cover most of the range of types of 'consultation' considered in this section. However, the term is probably most useful if we confine its use in the British context to a relatively narrow meaning, namely that government determines policy and uses interest groups to implement it through interest group regulation of their members.(32) Undoubtedly, one can find policies in Britain which conform or approximate to this concept including some attempts at incomes policies and, to a weaker extent, the operation of manpower policy through the Manpower Services Commission. The most notable form of corporatist style policy-making is 'self-regulation' of professions, trades and financial institutions. The history of British policy is also littered with what can be regarded as examples of failed corporatism, including incomes policies and the 'tripartism' of the 1974 Labour government's industrial strategy.

A corporatist style of policy processing depends on a set of assumptions that only occasionally apply in British politics: (1) that the views and objectives of government and the one or more sets of interest organizations are sufficiently close for them to arrive at agreement on policy; (2) that government will be capable of delivering its side of any such agreement (which depends on whether it

has control over Parliament and over events); (3) that the interest organizations can actually control the detailed decisions of their members either through ability to issue instructions, disciplinary mechanisms, or dissemination of professional values.

It is this last condition which is frequently lacking. For example, the Trades Union Congress is palpably unable to control the reaction of trade union members at factory floor level; Sector Working Parties may exort changes for their industry, but investment decisions are taken at the level of the firm, albeit in the context of government incentives. However, it is precisely because corporatism occurs only in certain circumstances that it can help us to understand British public policy. If we try to stretch the concept to cover every occasion when interest groups sit down with government and try to agree a policy then we have lost the value of the insights which the concept might provide.

Government as negotiator

Jordan and Richardson state that their major interest is in the area where consultation turns into negotiation.(33) The idea of negotiation implies that the government does have a view about what it would like to achieve, but is prepared to bargain about the policy to secure the agreement of groups or at least to minimize their opposition. Government may engage in negotiation either because it feels that an

agreed policy will be easier to legislate or implement, that it will suffer fewer adverse political consequences, or because it prefers a consensual style of policy-making. However, government is not simply an equal partner in such bargaining. It is certainly true than in many cases government may be highly dependent on others for the effective implementation of policy. However, government, in particular central government, has access to powers of legitimation and the right to extract resources which mark it out as a distinctive set of political actors.(34) Central government departments are not just another collection of 'groups'. Further, it is important to distinguish between negotiations of principle or of some substance on a policy and those which are concerned about the details of administration of a policy line determined by government. If there is indeed a 'logic of negotiation',(35) it is often because groups or non-central government bodies do what they can to ameliorate what they regard as the worst features of government plans. It will also be argued below that government may negotiate meaningfully with some groups while holding discussions not amounting to bargaining with others.

Cosmetic

Even when consultation does take place, it may be cosmetic only.(36) Government departments are increasingly required to consult affected groups or other government bodies

before announcing a decision. There are also political advantages in being seen to listen to the views of those affected. However, these pressures place a premium on the procedures and the appearance of consultation rather than the extent to which government is influenced by the expression of the views of others. The recognition of the requirement for consultation may take on the quality of a ritual incantation which indicates its lack of substance, as in a speech by Kenneth Clarke, the Employment Minister, to the 1985 Conservative Conference when he said:

> We will call upon trades union opinion, we will have green papers, we will consult, we will have white papers and we will not shrink from introducing further legislation to protect and maintain the rights of individual trades unionists within their trade union movement.

4. Participants in the consultation process

Consultation through policy communities

Turning to the second dimension of Table 2, that of the number of participants, we can see that at one extreme the government may be engaged in discussions with only one recognized group (though there may be other groups which are excluded from discussions). This has traditionally been the case in agriculture, where the farmers were the sole relevant group, though by the mid 1980s there were signs that the policy community was opening up to allow

conservation groups to participate.

Rather more policy communities consist of a number of different groups. It is obviously important to distinguish between circumstances where those groups share a common set of objectives or mutual or interdependent interest and and those where the groups themselves disagree and lack such interdependent interest. Multilateral discussions between government and groups are much more likely in the former case, while where there is disagreement the government may prefer 'serial bilateral negotiations'. Clearly, where there is disagreement among groups the government's own scope for manoeuver is increased, except in cases where all groups are intransigent and each separately has an effective power of veto. Where a number of groups are involved, their participation in the consultation process may be skewed, with some groups being engaged in meaningful consultation, while other groups are asked to state their views for cosmetic reasons. Different groups may also have different potential for assisting or thwarting government intentions.

Focussing on consultation as negotiation may lead us to overlook the fact that patterns of representation may often be lopsided, in part because of resources available to groups for bargaining, and in part because of <u>the discretion of government in choosing with whom it will negotiate</u>. For example, the tobacco manufacturers bargain directly with the Department of Health and Social Security

about tobacco advertising and tobacco sponsorship of sports events. The Health Education Council (a government advisory body) and Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), a government-funded 'pressure group', make representations to the government but are not engaged in 'bargaining' since they have no bargainable resources except for use of publicity. This illustration is notable for the role of the government in creating two of the participants, HEC and ASH, which were putting pressure on it; government can create countervailing pressure organizations.

The concept of the 'legitimacy' of groups reflects the crucial importance in Britain of receiving official recognition as a group which must be consulted on relevant issues.(37) A number of considerations determine whether a group will be recognized as 'legitimate', and its political muscle is not irrelevant. Obviously, the extent to which the group is representative of those whose interests it claims to be advancing is very important. Also important are the nature of the demands advanced and the manner in which they are advanced. It is particularly interest groups rather than promotional groups (especially those campaigning for change rather than the status quo) with which government departments have close consultations.(38)

Inclusion on a list for consultation does not ensure equality of access. Trade unions and consumer groups as well as trade associations may be included, but as Jordan points out:

> Even where groups such as consumers are admitted to the consultative process, organisational weakness might mean that they fail fully to exploit their access. Accordingly the actual consultation pattern - even where not consciously contrived or manipulated - is likely to reflect subconscious or accidental bias.(39)

Even when the department is keen to consult, there may be practical problems on the group side. Jordan points out that 'Many groups are understaffed to meet the burden of consultation'.(40) As a result, groups may decline the opportunity to be consulted. Interest groups are likely to be weaker than local government associations, nationalized industries or 'quangos' in this respect. In other cases, the group may be unable to offer definitive comments in time because of the requirements for internal formulation of an official view. In such cases, the 'informal views of an officer' might be sought. Group resources devoted to relations with government departments are unlikely to be evenly distributed across all groups in a particular policy area. Some groups, such as some 'campaigning' groups, may suffer from low absolute resources, while others, such as many individual trade unions, although with substantial income may not treat back-up for consultations with government as a priority. Groups are also likely to differ on their ability to 'deliver' their membership on the basis of discussions which their officers or officials have held

with government. Jordan notes that the preparation of legislation 'involves large numbers of groups - though for many the involvement is restricted to pro forma or cosmetic consultation'.(41)

A change in political party or prime minister may affect the acceptability of a group. Mrs Whitehouse's National Viewers and Listeners Association was give a respectful hearing by the Home Office after Mrs Thatcher took office, whereas previously the Home Office had been almost totally unwilling to listen or take into account what the association was saying.(42) Trade unions, by contrast, feel relatively neglected by the Conservative government.

Ad hoc issue networks

Issues vary in the extent to which they are processed through individual sectors or existing policy communities. Some issues are processed through ad hoc issue networks, resulting in the involvement of a larger number of participants, both government departments and non-governmental organizations. An example here is the Westland affair in 1985, which involved both the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Industry. Such cross-community processing is most likely in one of two circumstances. The first is where there is a clash between the priorities of two different departments or policy communities. In such cases it is likely that the issue will

be pulled in to the centre for resolution through cabinet or cabinet committee.

The second is where an issue is marginal and relatively neglected by the department which at first sight would be responsible for it. This provides an opportunity for a 'pre-emptive strike' by another government organization to develop its own interests. Examples include the launching of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) by the Manpower Services Commission (not the Department of Education and Science) in 1982, and the launching by the Department of the Environment (rather than the Department of Industry) of local enterprise agencies. Two features are notable about both these examples. First is the lack of a defensive reaction by the minister heading the department which was 'attacked' (Sir Keith Joseph in both cases). The second is the pilot or developmental nature of the initiatives as originally launched. Moon and Richardson suggest that the TVEI experiment is of wider interest to observers of the UK policy style, suggesting that radical innovation is possible even in a period of resource squeeze.(43) The view taken here is that the TVEI type of initiative depends on a set of circumstances and issue characteristics which, while not unique, cannot be generalized to the British policy process more broadly.

Open consultation

The opposite extreme from single-group policy communities

is 'open consultation', where a large and varied collection of groups, or even the general public, are able to participate, or at least have the opportunity of formally recording their views. In some cases, the widespread participation may be initiated by government because of the broad-ranging impact of proposals, as with the proposed introduction of value added tax and the 1985 social security proposals. In the case of the social security proposals in 1985 the government even placed advertisements inviting the general public to submit their comments. Wide-ranging consultation is, of course, no guarantee that all views will be given equal weighting.

In other cases the government may not be able to prevent debate about an issue broadening out from the closed policy community already involved. However, as in the case of the nuclear energy debate, there can be advantages to government in such public discussion. Williams, writing of the public nuclear debate of the mid 1970s and of the Windscale inquiry in particular notes:

> From the perspective of government the public nuclear debate of the mid-seventies could be viewed as having facilitated the discharge of two distinctively different functions. First, a controlled debate bringing in Parliament and with a good availability of information and adequate opportunities for involvement - itself quite different from participation - was a politically

> attractive way of accomodating conflict. The ensuing delay in making decisions had then to be tolerated as a necessary cost of securing at least a grudging, and of particular importance, non-violent acceptance. Second, public debate was also a genuine means, in circumstances involving at least some uncertainty, of getting all relevant questions identified if not answered, and of testing BNFL's case. The first of these functions no doubt amounted to a form of manipulation, but government is in part about that.(44)

However, public discussion does not preclude additional private discussion between government departments and affected interests, nor does it prevent government, if it can manage it politically, from circumscribing some aspects of a policy sector as suitable for open processing and others as more appropriate for internalized processing.

For some, but not most, issues, the government sets up a royal commission or a committee of inquiry or appoints consultants to examine the issue and report back, perhaps making recommendations. Recent British governments have made less use of Royal Commissions since their heyday in the mid 1960s. To an extent, commissions and committees do result in relatively greater openness in the processing of an issue, taking it out of a purely private interest-group-government dialogue. However, those making representations to a commission are often the same groups

as would have made private representations to government departments - and, indeed, do so after the report of the commission is published. Inquiry committees are not a substitute for consulation between government departments and groups but an addition to it.

A potential for greater openness in those making representations on an issue is also provided by major planning inquiries, such as those into an application by British Nuclear Fuels expand its facilities at Windscale (now Sellafield), from the National Coal Board to develop coal mines in the Vale of Belvoir, and from the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) to construct a water-cooled nuclear power reactor at Sizewell. Although technically concerned with land use issues, such inquiries provide an opportunity for wider policy issues to be aired. However, the cost of legal representation or expert advice may mean lopsided opportunities for objectors at inquiries, giving a potential advantage to well-funded private firms or public bodies with access to specialists. Opportunities for public airing of issues are greatest where there is a split in the 'policy community' itself, as at the Sizewell inquiry, where the South of Scotland Electricity Board favoured the advanced gas cooled reactor to the pressurized water reactor preferred by the CEGB.

One result of major planning inquiries has been delays in the taking and implementation of decisions on major projects. In an attempt to short-circuit such delays and

the extended public controversy given an arena in inquiries, the Conservative government has since 1979 made greater use of special development orders. The government has made it clear that there will be no planning inquiry into the Channel Tunnel project to avoid the inevitable delays and even possible resulting cancellation of the project.

Conclusion

This paper has presented a reworking rather than a refutation of the stress placed on policy communities and consultation by Jordan and Richardson. Many of the concepts and categories in this article have been used by them, albeit in a different way, and much of the empirical material referred to in this article has been researched by Jordan and Richardson and their colleagues, though somewhat different conclusions have been drawn from it. This article has stressed variation rather than a norm, the importance of the distinctive resources available to British central government, and the integrative elements in British central government which partially offset the 'sectorization' of policy-making.

Richardson and Jordan are fond of referring to Jack Hayward's distinction between 'heroic' and 'humdrum' decision-making and endorse Hayward's conclusion that the British style is 'humdrum'.(45) However, both some writers on corporatism and Richardson and Jordan appear to engage

in a 'heroic' style of theorizing about British policy-making, claiming to have identified 'The Coming Corporatism'(46) or the British policy style. In doing so they have to conflate or fudge or treat as exceptions the variety of styles which are observable in practice. This article suggests the need for a more 'humdrum' approach to analysing British public policy.

Notes

I would like to thank Grant Jordan and Rod Rhodes for comments on an earlier draft.

1. G. Jordan and J. Richardson, 'The British Policy Style or the Logic of Negotiation', in J. J. Richardson (ed.), Policy Styles in Western Europe (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982).

2. Jordan and Richardson, 'The British Policy Style or the Logic of Negotiation', p. 82.

3. See H. Heclo and A. Wildavsky, The Private Government of Public Money (London: Macmillan, 1974); B. W. Hogwood, 'Analysing Industrial Policy: A Multi-perspective Approach', Public Administration Bulletin, 29 (1979), pp. 18-24.

4. Jordan and Richardson, 'The British Policy Style or the Logic of Negotiation', pp. 88-9.

5. See Sir R. Clarke, 'The Machinery of Government', in W. Thornhill (ed.), The Modernisation of British Government (London: Pitman, 1975), pp. 63-94; C. Pollitt, Manipulating the Machine (London: Allen and Unwin, 1984).

6. J. J. Richardson and A. G. Jordan, Governing under Pressure (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1979).

7. G. Gustafsson and J. J. Richardson, 'Concepts of Rationality and the Policy Process', European Journal of Political Research, 7 (1979), 415-36.

8. Jordan and Richardson, 'The British Policy Style or the Logic of Negotiation', pp. 88-90. See also L. J. Sharpe, 'Central Coordination and the Policy Network', Political Studies, 33 (1985), 361-81.

9. Gustaffson and Richardson, 'Concepts of Rationality and the Policy Process', p. 424, explicitly state that 'it is quite possible that within the same political system, different sectors may exhibit different policy styles' (their emphasis). Jordan and Richardson, 'The British Policy Style or the Logic of Negotiation', p. 80, and Richardson and Jordan, Governing under Pressure, p. vii, acknowledge in passing the existence of variations in styles. R. Rhodes, 'Power-Dependence, Policy Communities and Intergovernmental Networks', Public Administration Bulletin, 49 (1985), pp. 4-31, argues that Richardson and Jordan severely understate the difference between policy areas.

10. M. Kogan, The Politics of Education: Edward Boyle and

Anthony Crosland in Conversation with Maurice Kogan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

11. Sharpe, 'Central Coordination and the Policy Network'.

12. J. K. Benson, 'Networks and Policy Sectors: A Framework for Extending Interorganizational Analysis', in D. Rogers and D. Whetten (eds.), Interorganizational Coordination (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1982); Rhodes, 'Power-Dependence, Policy Communities and Intergovernmental Networks'.

13. Jordan and Richardson, 'The British Policy Style or the Logic of Negotiation'.

14. For a review of different 'decision arenas' within the British cabinet system, see B. W. Hogwood and T. T. Mackie, 'The United Kingdom: Decision Sifting in a Secret Garden', in T. T. Mackie and B. W. Hogwood (eds.), Unlocking the Cabinet (London: Sage, 1985).

15. On incremental budgeting see A. Wildavsky, Budgeting: A Comparative Theory of the Budgetary Process (Boston: Little Brown, 1975).

16. Richardson and Jordan, Governing under Pressure, p. 48, recognise the eixstence of a variety of types of consultation.

17. A. Wildavsky, 'If Planning is Everything, Maybe It's Nothing', Policy Sciences, 4 (1973), 127-53.

18. A. G. Jordan, 'Consultation Processes as De Facto Legislation'. Paper presented to International Political Science Association World Congress, Paris, July 1985, p. 19.

19. Jordan and Richardson, 'The British Policy Style or the Logic of Negotiation', p.97.

20. See W. Wallace, The Foreign Policy Process in Britain (London: RIIA, 1975); J. Barber, Who Makes British Foreign Policy? (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1976).

21. Wallace, The Foreign Policy Process in Britain, p. 271.

22. H. Wallace, 'Implementation across National Boundaries', in D. Lewis and H. Wallace, Policies into Practice (London: Heinemann, 1984).

23. Wallace, The Foreign Policy Process in Britain, p. 6.

24. Wallace, The Foreign Policy Process in Britain,

p. 74.

25. Wallace, The Foreign Policy Process in Britain, p. 13.

26. Wallace, The Foreign Policy Process in Britain, p. 121.

27. Wallace, The Foreign Policy Process in Britain, p. 132.

28. See P. Dunleavy, 'Quasi-governmental Sector Professionalism: Some Implications for Public Policy-Making in Britain', in A. Barker (ed.), Quangos in Britain (London: Macmillan, 1982).

29. To be reported in A. G. Jordan and J. J. Richardson, Government and Pressure Groups in Britain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

30. Jordan, 'Consultation Processes as De Facto Legislation'.

31. See A. G. Jordan, 'Iron Triangles, Woolly Corporatism, or Elastic Nets: Images of the Policy Process', Journal of Public Policy, 1 (1981), 95-23.

32. Cf. Schmitter's definition: 'Corporatism can be defined as a system of interest representation in which the constitutent units are organized into a limited number of systematic, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories'. P. C. Schmitter, 'Still the Century of Corporatism?', Review of Politics, 36 (1974), 85-131.

33. Jordan and Richardson, 'The British Policy Style or the Logic of Negotiation', p. 86.

34. See also Rhodes, 'Power-Dependence, Policy Communities and Intergovernmental Networks'.

35. Jordan and Richardson, 'The British Policy Style or the Logic of Negotiation'.

36. As noted by Jordan and Richardson, 'The British Policy Style or the Logic of Negotiation', p. 86, and Jordan, 'Consultation Processes as De Facto Legislation'.

37. In their various writings Jordan and Richardson stress the importance of 'insider' status in gaining membership of closed policy communities. The points being stressed here are the discretion accorded to government in granting this status and in choosing how seriously to engage in bargaining with other members of the community.

38. M. Davies, Politics of Pressure (London: BBC, 1985), ch. 2.

39. Jordan, 'Consultation Processes as De Facto Legislation', p. 16.

40. Jordan, 'Consultation Processes as De Facto Legislation', p. 17.

41. Jordan, 'Consultation Processes as De Facto Legislation', p. 17.

42. Davies, Politics of Pressure, p. 118.

43. J. Moon and J. J. Richardson, 'Policy-making with a Difference?: The Technical and Vocational Initiative', Public Administration, 62 (1984), 23-33.

44. R. Williams, The Nuclear Power Decisions (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 313.

45. J. E. S. Hayward, 'National Aptitudes for Planning in Britain, France and Italy', Government and Opposition, 9 (1974), pp. 398-9.

46. R. E. Pahl and J. T. Winkler, 'The Coming Corporatism', Challenge, March/April (1975), pp. 28-35.