Chapter 9

Power, politics and the state

Introduction

In this chapter we are mainly concerned with the nature and distribution of power in modern industrial societies.

Many sociologists argue that political sociology is the study of power in its broadest sense. Thus Dowse and Hughes state that 'politics is about "power", politics occurs when there are differentials in power' (Dowse and Hughes, 1972). In terms of this definition, any social relationship that involves power differentials is political. Political relationships would extend from parents assigning domestic chores to their children to teachers enforcing discipline in the classroom; from a manager organizing a workforce to a general ordering troops into battle.

However, the traditional study of politics has concentrated on the state and the various institutions of government such as Parliament and the judiciary. Sociologists have been particularly concerned with the state, but they have examined it in relation to society as a whole, rather than in isolation.

Sociologists often distinguish between two forms of power, authority and coercion:

1 Authority is that form of power which is accepted as legitimate – that is, right and just – and therefore obeyed on that basis. Thus, if members of British society accept that Parliament has the right to make certain decisions and they regard those decisions as lawful, parliamentary power may be defined as legitimate authority.
2 Coercion is that form of power which is not regarded as legitimate by those subject to it. Thus, from the point of view of some Basque nationalists, the activities of the Spanish police and army in the Basque province may be regarded as coercion.

However, the distinction between authority and coercion is not as clearcut as the above definitions suggest. It has often been argued that both forms of power are based ultimately on physical force, and that those who enforce the law are able to resort to physical force whether their power is regarded as legitimate or not.

We will begin by looking at Max Weber's influential views on power and types of authority.

Max Weber – power and types of authority

Max Weber defined power as:

> *the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action.*
>
> Weber, in Gerth and Mills, 1948, p. 180

In other words, power consists of the ability to get your own way even when others are opposed to your wishes.

Weber was particularly concerned to distinguish different types of authority. He suggested that there were three sources: charismatic, traditional, and rational–legal.

Charismatic authority

Charismatic authority derives from the devotion felt by subordinates for a leader who is believed to have exceptional qualities. These qualities are seen as supernatural, super-human, or at least exceptional compared to lesser mortals.

Charismatic leaders are able to sway and control their followers by direct emotional appeals which excite devotion and strong loyalties. Historical examples which come close to charismatic authority might include Alexander the Great, Napoleon and Fidel Castro. More ordinary people, such as teachers or managers, may also use charisma to exercise power.

Traditional authority

Weber called the second type of authority traditional authority. In this case authority rests upon a belief in the 'rightness' of established customs and traditions. Those in authority command obedience on the basis of their traditional status which is usually inherited. Their subordinates are controlled by feelings of loyalty and obligation to long-established positions of power.

The feudal system of medieval Europe is an example of traditional authority: monarchs and nobles owed their positions to inherited status and the personal loyalty of their subjects.

Rational–legal authority

The final type of authority distinguished by Weber was rational–legal authority. In this case, unlike charismatic and traditional authority, legitimacy and control stem neither from the perceived personal qualities of the leader and the devotion they excite, nor from a commitment to traditional wisdom. Rational–legal authority is based on the acceptance of a set of impersonal rules.

Those who possess authority are able to issue commands and have them obeyed because others accept the legal framework that supports their authority. Thus a judge, a tax inspector or a military commander are obeyed because others accept the legal framework that gives them their power. The rules on which their authority is based are rational in the sense that they are consciously constructed for the attainment of a particular goal and they specify the means by which that goal is to be attained. For example, laws governing the legal system are designed to achieve the goal of 'justice'.

Ideal types

Weber stressed that, in reality, authority would never conform perfectly to any of his three types. His three categories are ideal types, each of which defines a 'pure' form of authority. In any particular example, authority may stem from two or more sources. It is therefore possible to find examples of authority which approximate to one of these types, but it is unlikely that a perfect example of any could be found.

Weber's attempts to define power and authority have been highly influential. The pluralist view of power and the state has adopted Weber's definition as a basis for measuring who has power in modern industrial societies.

Pluralists concentrate on the will (or desires) of individuals or groups to achieve particular ends. The wishes that people have are then compared to actual decisions taken by a government. The group whose wishes appear to be carried out are held to possess greater power than those who oppose them. Therefore, power is measured by comparing the stated wishes of individuals or groups who seek to influence government policy, with the actions taken by their government. (Pluralist views on power and the state are discussed fully below, see pp. 593–601.)

Steven Lukes – a radical view of power

Despite the acceptance of Weber's definition of power by many sociologists, some writers believe that it is too narrow. Steven Lukes (1974) has put forward a radical view of power as an alternative. He argues that power has three dimensions or faces, rather than just one.

Decision making

Like pluralists, Lukes sees the first face of power in terms of decision making, where different individuals or groups express different policy preferences and influence the making of decisions over various issues. Lukes would accept that if a government followed the policies advocated by the trade unions, this would represent evidence that the unions had power. However, he believes that it is misleading to concentrate entirely on decisions taken, for power can be exercised in less obvious ways.

Non-decision making

The second face of power does not concern decision making, but rather focuses on non-decision making. Power may be used to prevent certain issues from being discussed, or decisions about them from being taken.

From this point of view, individuals or groups exercising power do so by preventing those who take a decision from considering all the possible alternative sources of action, or by limiting the range of decisions they are allowed to take.

For example, a teacher might offer students the opportunity to decide whether to do a piece of homework that week or the following week. The class appears to have power, for they have been given the opportunity to reach a decision. In reality, however, most power still rests with the teacher who has limited the options open to the students. The students

are not free to decide whether or not they do this particular piece of work, nor can they choose to reject doing homework altogether.

Shaping desires

The third face of power strays even further from an emphasis on decision making, and the preferences expressed by members of society. Lukes claims that power can be exercised by shaping desires, manipulating the wishes and desires of social groups. A social group may be persuaded to accept, or even to desire, a situation that is harmful to them.

Some feminists would argue that men exercise power over women in contemporary Britain by persuading them that being a mother and housewife are the most desirable roles for women. In reality, feminists claim, women who occupy these roles are exploited by, and for the benefit of, men.

Lukes's definition of power

Having examined the nature of power, Lukes is able to conclude that power can be defined by saying that 'A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests.' In other words, Lukes argues that power is exercised over those who are harmed by its use, whether they are aware they are being harmed or not.

Lukes has been responsible for refining the concept of power, and showing that it has more than one dimension. As he himself admits, though, what is in a person's interests, or what is good for them, is ultimately a matter of opinion. A mother and housewife might deny that her role in society is any less desirable than that of her husband. She might also deny that she is being exploited.

Despite this problem, the radical definition of power has become increasingly influential. Marxist sociologists in particular have used this definition to attack the evidence used by sociologists advocating other perspectives.

We will develop this issue of defining and measuring power as the various theories are examined in detail. Next, however, we will analyse the role of the state in relation to power.

The state

Definitions of the state

The definition of the state is probably less controversial than the definition of power. Weber provided a definition with which most sociologists are in broad agreement. He defined the state as 'a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber, in Gerth and Mills, 1948).

In modern Britain, the state rules over a clearly-defined geographical area, which includes England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland (although there is now some devolution of power to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).

Only the central authority is believed by most members of society to have the right to use force to achieve its ends. Other groups and individuals may resort to violence, but the actions of terrorists, football 'hooligans' and murderers are not seen as legitimate. The state alone can wage war or use the legal system to imprison people against their will.

On the basis of Weber's definition, the state can be said to consist of the government or legislature which passes laws, the bureaucracy or civil service which implements governmental decisions, the police who are responsible for law enforcement, and the armed forces whose job it is to protect the state from external threats.

Many sociologists see the state as consisting of a wider set of institutions and, in Britain, would include welfare services, and the education and health services. Some go even further and see nationalized industries (such as the Post Office) as part of the state. However, in developing their theories of the state most sociologists have concentrated upon the more central institutions such as the government and the civil service.

The twentieth-century world came to be dominated by nation-states which laid claim to territory in every corner of the world (see pp. 263–70 for a discussion of nationalism). However, although states which conform to Weber's definition have existed for thousands of years, and include ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt, and the Aztecs of Central America, the state is a comparatively new feature of many societies. Anthropologists have discovered a number of stateless 'simple' societies. These are sometimes called acephalous or headless societies.

Stateless societies

In the 1930s, E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1951) carried out a study of the Nuer society in Africa. The society consisted of some 40 separate tribes, none of which had a head or chief.

Only a few decisions had to be taken which affected the tribe as a whole, such as whether to mount a raid on a neighbouring tribe, or whether to initiate young men into adult status. Such decisions appear to have been reached informally through discussions between members of the tribe.

Each tribal grouping was based on a particular geographical area, but they did not claim exclusive rights to using that land. More than half the Nuer lived in tribal areas in which they had not been born.

There was no legal system as such, and there were no particular individuals charged with special responsibility for policing the community. Instead, men who believed they had been wronged were expected to challenge the offender to a duel to the death.

In this society there was no government or other institution which claimed a monopoly of the legitimate use of force, and the society was not based upon a clearly defined territory. As such, Nuer society can be seen as stateless.

The feudal state

A number of commentators believe that the modern centralized state is also a relatively new feature of many parts of Europe. They suggest that it did not develop until after the feudal period.

Under feudalism the legitimate use of force was not concentrated in the hands of a centralized authority. While, in theory, the monarch ruled at the centre, in practice, military power and the control of particular territories were in the hands of feudal lords in each region. Gianfranco Poggi has described how, for example, in the Maconnâis in feudal France, the King was a 'dimly perceived, politically ineffective figure' (Poggi, 1978). The Count of the Maconnâis had originally been granted land by the King in return for providing warriors, but by the twelfth century lesser feudal lords, to whom the Count had granted territory, effectively ruled their own territories and monopolized military power. Thus the state was not centralized in any one place, but located in many separate centres throughout the nation.

Only in the seventeenth century did the French monarchy successfully establish its authority over the aristocracy in the regions. Furthermore, it was only in the nineteenth century that transport and communications had developed sufficiently for it to become possible for the centralized state to exercise close control over the far-flung corners of its territory.

The modern state

The centralized state developed comparatively recently in many areas of the world. However, its importance in modern, industrialized societies increased dramatically in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In Britain, for instance, in this period the state greatly extended its involvement in, and control over, economic affairs, and the provision of welfare, healthcare and education. These developments are reflected in the rising proportion of Gross National Product (the total amount of economic activity in a society that can be measured in monetary terms) spent by the government. The economists C.V. Brown and P.M. Jackson (1982) have calculated that government spending as a proportion of Gross National Product (GNP) has risen in Britain, from 8 per cent in 1890, to 29 per cent in 1932, to 40.2 per cent in 1966, and to 51.4 per cent in 1976. By 1997-8 it had gone back down to 38.3 per cent (*Independent Budget Review*, 10 March 1999).

The increasing importance of the state in industrial societies has prompted sociologists to devote considerable attention to this institution. In particular they have debated which groups in society control the state and in whose interests the state is run. We will now examine the competing sociological perspectives on power and the state, beginning with a functionalist perspective.

Power – a functionalist perspective

Most sociological theories of power follow Weber's definition in two important respects:

1 Weber's definition implies that those who hold power do so at the expense of others. It suggests that there is a fixed amount of power, and, therefore, if some hold power, others do not. This view is sometimes known as a constant-sum concept of power. Since the amount of power is constant, power is held by an individual or group to the extent that it is not held by others.

2 The second important implication of Weber's definition is that power-holders will tend to use power to further their own interests. Power is used to further the sectional interests of particular groups in society. This view is sometimes known as a variable-sum concept of power, since power in society is not seen as fixed or constant. Instead it is variable in the sense that it can increase or decrease.

Talcott Parsons – the variable-sum concept of power

Power and collective goals

Talcott Parsons's view of power was developed from his general theory of the nature of society. He began from the assumption that value consensus is essential for the survival of social systems. From shared values derive collective goals, that is, goals shared by members of society. For example, if materialism is a major value of Western industrial society, collective goals such as economic expansion and higher living standards can be seen to stem from this value. The more Western societies are able to realize these goals, the greater the power that resides in the social system. Steadily rising living standards and economic growth are therefore indications of an increase of power in society.

Parsons's view of power differentials within society also derived from his general theory. Since goals are shared by all members of society, power will generally be used in the furtherance of collective goals. As a result, both sides of the power relationship will benefit and everybody will gain by the arrangement. For instance, politicians in Western societies will promote policies for economic expansion which, if successful, will raise the living standards of the population as a whole.

Thus, from this viewpoint, the exercise of power usually means that everybody wins. This forms a basis for the cooperation and reciprocity that Parsons considered essential for the maintenance and well-being of society.

Authority and collective goals

As we saw in Chapter 7, Parsons regarded power differentials as necessary for the effective pursuit of collective goals. If members of society pool their efforts and resources, they are more likely to realize their shared goals than if they operate as individuals. Cooperation on a large scale requires organization and direction, which necessitate positions of command. Some are therefore granted the power to direct others.

This power takes the form of authority. It is generally regarded as legitimate since it is seen to further collective goals. This means that some are granted authority for the benefit of all.

Parsons's views may be illustrated by the following example.

One of the major goals of traditional Sioux Indian society was success in hunting. This activity involved cooperation and power relationships. During the summer months the buffalo – the main food supply of the tribe – were gathered in large herds on the northern plains of North America. The buffalo hunt was a large-scale enterprise under the authority and control of marshals who were appointed by the warrior societies. An effective hunt required considerable organization and direction and was strictly policed. In particular, the marshals were concerned to prevent excitable young warriors from jumping the gun and stampeding the herd, which might endanger the food supply of the entire tribe. Marshals had the authority to beat those who disobeyed the rules and destroy their clothes and the harness of their horses. Thus, by granting power to the marshals, by accepting it as legitimate, and obeying it on that basis, the whole tribe benefited from the exercise of their authority.

Power in Western democracies

Parsons's analysis of the basis of political power in Western democracies provides a typical illustration of his views on the nature of power. He argued that:

> *Political support should be conceived of as a generalized grant of power which, if it leads to electional success, puts elected leadership in a position analogous to a banker. The 'deposits' of power made by constituents are revocable, if not at will, at the next election.*
>
> Parsons, 1967, p. 339

Just as money is deposited in a bank, members of society deposit power in political leaders. Just as depositors can withdraw their money from the bank, so the electorate can withdraw its grant of power from political leaders at the next election. In this sense, power resides ultimately with members of society as a whole. Finally, just as money generates interest for the depositor, so grants of power generate benefits for the electorate since they are used primarily to further collective goals. In this way, power in society can increase.

Many sociologists have argued that Parsons's views of the nature and application of power in society are naïve. They suggest that he has done little more than translate into sociological jargon the rationalizations promoted by the power-holders to justify their use of power. In particular, they argue that Parsons has failed to appreciate that power is frequently used to further sectional interests rather than to benefit society as a whole. We will analyse these criticisms in detail in the following sections.

Power and the state – a pluralist perspective

Pluralism is a theory which claims to explain the nature and distribution of power in Western democratic societies. Classical pluralism was the original form that this perspective took, but it has been heavily criticized. Some supporters of this perspective have modified their position and have adopted an elite pluralist view which takes account of some of these criticisms.

We will first describe and evaluate classical pluralism, before considering elite pluralism at the end of this section.

Classical pluralism

This version of pluralism has important similarities with the Parsonian functionalist theory. Pluralists agree with Parsons that power ultimately derives from the population as a whole:

1 They accept that the government and state in a Western democracy act in the interests of that society and according to the wishes of its members.
2 They see the political systems of countries such as the USA, Britain and France as the most advanced systems of government yet devised, and regard them as the most effective way for a population to exercise power and govern a country.
3 They regard the exercise of power through the state to be legitimate rather than coercive, since it is held to be based upon the acceptance and cooperation of the population.

Pluralists, however, part company from Parsons in three important respects.

The nature of power

First, pluralists follow Weber in accepting a constant-sum concept of power. There is seen to be a fixed amount of power which is distributed among the population of a society. They do not accept Parsons's variable-sum concept of power, which sees it as a resource held by society as a whole.

Sectional interests

Second, they deny that democratic societies have an all-embracing value consensus. They would agree with Parsons that members of such societies share some interests and wishes in common. For example, most citizens of the USA share a commitment to the constitution of the country and the political institutions such as the presidency, the Congress and the electoral system.

However, pluralists do not accept that members of society share common interests or values in relation to every issue. They believe that industrial society is increasingly differentiated into a variety of social groups and sectional interests, and, with the increasingly specialized division of labour, the number and diversity of occupational groups steadily grow. Groups such as doctors, teachers, business people and unskilled manual workers may have different interests. Each group may be represented by its own union or professional association, and these groups may put forward conflicting requests to the government.

Pluralists do not deny the existence of class, or division based on age, gender, religion or ethnicity. However, they do deny that any single division dominates any individual's wishes or actions. According to their view, each individual has a large number of different interests. A male manual worker might not just be a member of the working class, he might also be a car owner, a mortgage payer, an avid reader of library books and a father of two children in higher education. Therefore, while he has certain interests as a manual worker, other interests stem from other aspects of his position in society. As a car owner he has an interest in road tax and petrol prices being kept low, as a mortgage payer in interest rates being reduced, as a library user in more government expenditure on this service, and as a father in higher student grants. Another range of interests could be outlined for a female professional.

To the founder of the pluralist perspective, the nineteenth-century French writer de Tocqueville (1945, first published 1835), a democratic political system requires that individuals have a large number of specific interests. He believed that democracy would become unworkable if one division in society came to dominate all others. Such a situation could lead to a tyranny of the majority: one group in society would be in a permanent majority and the interests and wishes of the minority could be totally disregarded.

Northern Ireland could be seen as a contemporary example of this situation, where the population is split between a majority of Protestants and a minority of Catholics. Most individuals identify so strongly with their religious groupings that other interests are seen to be of secondary importance. The existence of a permanent majority of Protestants prevents a democratic system similar to that in the rest of the UK – that is, operating in such a way that

each member of the Catholic minority has as much influence on government policy as each member of the Protestant majority.

The state

The third difference to the functionalist view follows from the pluralists' denial that a complete value consensus exists. Since individuals have different interests, political leaders and the state cannot reflect the interests of all members of society in taking any single decision.

To pluralists the state is seen as an honest broker which takes account of all the conflicting demands made on it by different sections of society. The state mediates between different groups, ensuring that all of them have some influence on government policy, but that none gets its own way all the time. On one particular occasion the government might take a decision which favours car owners, such as deciding to build a new motorway. On another it might decide against such a project in order to take account of the protests of environmentalists. On a third, the government might reach a compromise, concluding that the road is necessary but changing the route in order to protect an area of particular environmental importance. Pluralists argue that every group over a period of time has its interests reflected in governmental decisions, but because of the divisions within society it is not possible for the state to satisfy everyone all of the time. In Raymond Aron's words, 'government becomes a business of compromise'.

Classical pluralism – political parties and interest groups

Political parties

From a pluralist perspective, competition between two or more political parties is an essential feature of representative government. Political parties are organizations which attempt to get representatives elected to positions in parliaments or their local equivalents. Pluralists claim that competition for office between political parties provides the electorate with an opportunity to select its leaders and a means of influencing government policy.

This view forms the basis of Seymour M. Lipset's definition of democracy. According to Lipset:

> *Democracy in a complete society may be defined as a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials, and a social mechanism which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office.*
>
> Lipset, 1981, first pub. 1959, p. 27

For efficient government, Lipset argued that competition between contenders for office must result in the granting of 'effective authority to one group' and the presence of an 'effective opposition' in the legislature as a check on the power of the governing party.

Pluralists claim that political parties in democratic societies are representative for the following reasons:

1. The public directly influences party policy, since, in order to be elected to govern, parties must reflect the wishes and interests of the electorate in their programmes.
2. If existing parties do not sufficiently represent sections of society, a new party will usually emerge, such as the Labour Party at the turn of the century in Britain, or the Referendum Party (which campaigned at the 1997 election against Britain accepting a single European currency).
3. Parties are accountable to the electorate since they will not regain power if they disregard the opinions and interests of the public.
4. Parties cannot simply represent a sectional interest since, to be elected to power, they require the support of various interests in society.

However, as Robert McKenzie stated, political parties must not be seen 'as the sole "transmission belts" on which political ideas and programmes are conveyed from the citizens to the legislature and the executive' (McKenzie, 1969). During their time in office and in opposition, parties 'mould and adapt their principles under innumerable pressures brought to bear by organized groups of citizens which operate for the most part outside the political system'. Such groups are known as interest or pressure groups

Interest groups

Unlike political parties, interest groups do not aim to take power in the sense of forming a government. Rather they seek to influence political parties and the various departments of state. Nor do interest groups usually claim to represent a wide range of interests. Instead their specified objective is to represent a particular interest in society.

Interest groups are often classified in terms of their aims as either protective or promotional groups:

1. Protective groups defend the interests of a particular section of society. Trade unions such as the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), professional associations such as the British Medical Association, and employers' organizations such as the Confederation of British Industry are classified as protective groups.
2. Promotional groups support a particular cause rather than guard the interests of a particular social group. Organizations such as the RSPCA, Friends of the Earth and the Lord's Day Observance Society are classified as promotional groups.

3 Membership of promotional groups is potentially larger and usually more varied than that of protective groups since they require only a commitment to their cause as a qualification for joining.

4 By comparison, membership of protective groups is usually limited to individuals of a particular status: for example, miners for membership of the NUM.

In practice, the distinction between protective and promotional groups is not clearcut, since the defence of an interest also involves its promotion.

Interest groups can bring pressure to bear in a number of ways:

1 By contributions to the funds of political parties, such as trade union contributions to the Labour Party.

2 By illegal payments to elected representatives and state officials – in other words, bribery. In 1994 it was revealed that at least one MP in Britain had received payments from Mohammed Al-Fayed in return for asking questions on his behalf in the House of Commons. Although not illegal, this example does suggest that money has sometimes been used to buy access to MPs and government ministers.

3 By appealing to public opinion. An effective campaign by an interest group can mobilize extensive public support, especially if it attracts widespread coverage by the mass media, and its arguments are seen to be valid. Certain conservation groups have successfully adopted this strategy. In the mid-1990s, protesters campaigning for rights for the disabled chained themselves to buses at the entrance to Downing Street. Another example is the campaign launched by rock musicians at the 1999 Brit Awards for the cancellation of a large part of the Third World's debt.

4 By various forms of civil disobedience or direct action. This approach has been used by a wide variety of interest groups. Examples include the gay rights group OutRage! interrupting a sermon by the Archbishop of Canterbury, hunt saboteurs trying to prevent fox hunting, and anti-roads protesters building tree-houses and tunnels to prevent work taking place.

5 By the provision of expertise. It has often been argued that, in modern industrial society, governments cannot operate without the specialized knowledge of interest groups. By providing this expertise, interest groups have an opportunity to directly influence government policy. In Britain, representatives of interest groups now have permanent places on hundreds of government advisory committees.

Interest groups and democracy

Pluralists see interest groups as necessary elements in a democratic system for a number of reasons.

Voting in elections involves only minimal participation in politics for members of a democracy. Classical pluralists believe that as many people as possible should participate as actively as possible in politics. They do not believe that in Britain, for instance, voting once every five years is an adequate level of participation. Interest groups provide the opportunity for many individuals – who are not members of political parties – to participate in politics. For example, many members of the Friends of the Earth limit their active interest in politics to participation in the activities of this organization.

Interest groups are also necessary because even those who have voted for a government may not agree with all its policies. In a party-political system it is necessary to choose between the overall packages offered by the opposing parties. Interest groups make it possible to alter some parts of a governing party's policies while retaining those with which a majority of the population agree.

Clearly it is also vital that those who voted for a losing party have some opportunity to allow their voice to be heard. To the classical pluralist, the large number and diversity of pressure groups allow all sections of society to have a say in politics.

Before an election, a party seeking office outlines its proposed policies in a manifesto. The electorate can choose who to vote for on the basis of the alternative manifestos put forward. However, manifestos cannot be completely comprehensive: new issues not covered by them may arise. In the 1979 election in Britain no reference was made to the Falkland Islands in the manifestos of the major parties, since the Argentinian occupation of the islands had not been anticipated.

Interest groups provide the means through which the public can make their views known to a governing party as circumstances change and new issues arise. Furthermore, interest groups can mobilize public concern over issues that have been neglected or overlooked by the government. The British interest group Shelter draws the attention of the public and government alike to the plight of the homeless, while the Animal Liberation Front campaigns for the rights of voteless and voiceless animals.

According to classical pluralists, then, all sections of society and all shades of political opinion are represented and reflected in a wide variety of groups in Western democracies. Anyone who feels that they are being neglected by the government can form a new pressure group in order to rectify the temporary flaw in the operation of the democratic system.

Measuring power

Pluralists have provided empirical evidence to support their claim that Western societies are governed in accordance with democratic principles. The evidence they advance is based upon an attempt

to show that a government's policies reflect a compromise between the wishes of the various sectional interests in society. They therefore concentrate upon the first face of power: decision making.

Pluralists compare the decisions taken by a government with the wishes of its general public, and the wishes expressed by different groups in the population. By examining evidence from opinion polls and the stated policy preferences of interest groups, pluralists reach the conclusion that countries such as Britain and the USA are genuinely democratic.

Robert A. Dahl – *Who Governs?*

One of the most famous studies supporting the pluralist view is *Who Governs?* by Robert A. Dahl (1961). Dahl investigated local politics in New Haven, Connecticut. He examined a series of decisions in three major issue areas:

1 urban renewal, which involved the redevelopment of the city centre;
2 political nominations, with particular emphasis on the post of mayor;
3 education, which concerned issues such as the siting of schools, and teachers' salaries.

By selecting a range of different issues, Dahl claimed that it should be possible to discover whether a single group monopolized decision making in community affairs.

Dahl found no evidence of one group dominating decision making, but concluded that power was dispersed among various interest groups. He discovered that interest groups only became directly involved in local politics when the issues were seen as directly relevant to their particular concerns. Dahl claimed that the evidence showed that local politics was a business of bargaining and compromise, with no one group dominating decision making.

For example, business interests, trade unions and the local university were involved in the issue of urban renewal. The mayor and his assistants made the major decisions in consultation with the various interest groups and produced a programme that was acceptable to all parties concerned.

Dahl rejected the view that economic interests dominated decision making. He concluded:

> *Economic notables, far from being a ruling group, are simply one of many groups out of which individuals sporadically emerge to influence the policies and acts of city officials. Almost anything one might say about the influence of economic notables could be said with equal justice about half a dozen other groups in New Haven.*
>
> Dahl, 1961, p. 72

Power in Britain

Similar studies on national politics have been conducted by pluralist researchers in Britain. In an important study using the decision-making approach, Christopher J. Hewitt (1974) examined 24 policy issues which arose in the British Parliament between 1944 and 1964. The issues covered four main policy areas:

1 foreign policy (e.g. the Suez crisis of 1956);
2 economic policy (e.g. the nationalization of road haulage);
3 welfare policy (e.g. the Rent Act of 1957);
4 social policy (e.g. the introduction of commercial television).

Hewitt compared the decisions reached by Parliament with the views of the interest groups involved and contemporary public opinion. In some cases the decisions favoured certain interest groups to the exclusion of others. In other cases government decisions favoured some groups but 'substantial concessions were made to the opposing interests'. However, Hewitt found that no one interest group consistently got its own way. He stated that 'Neither the business group nor any other appears to be especially favoured by the government.'

Poll data on public opinion were available on 11 of the 24 issues included in the study. In only one case – the abolition of capital punishment in 1957 – did the decision of Parliament oppose public opinion.

Hewitt's study suggested that both a variety of specialized interests and public opinion in general are represented in the British Parliament. He concluded that:

> *[the] picture of national power that is revealed suggests a 'pluralist' interpretation since a diversity of conflicting interests are involved in many issues, without any one issue being consistently successful in realizing its goals.*
>
> Hewitt, 1974

The CBI

A study of the relationship between government and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) by Wyn Grant and David Marsh (1977) reached similar conclusions.

The CBI was created in 1965 from an amalgamation of three employers' federations. Membership of the CBI includes most of the top 200 manufacturing companies in Britain. It has direct channels of communication with government ministers and powerful civil servants, and is concerned with furthering the interests of private industry, particularly the manufacturing sector. In order to assess its

influence on government, Grant and Marsh examined four pieces of legislation from 1967 to 1972:

1 The CBI fiercely opposed the Iron and Steel Act of 1967 which renationalized the iron and steel industry. Its views were rejected by the Labour government and, according to Grant and Marsh, the CBI 'fought an almost entirely unsuccessful defensive action'.
2 The Clean Air Act of 1968 aimed to reduce air pollution. The two main interest groups involved were the CBI and the National Society for Clean Air. The CBI was successful in obtaining various modifications to the bill, and the resulting act was a compromise between the views of the two interest groups.
3 The Deposit of Poisonous Wastes Act of 1972 was concerned with the disposal of solid and semi-solid toxic wastes. The Conservative government was under strong pressure from conservation groups and, in particular, the Warwickshire Conservation Society, which mobilized strong public support. Although the CBI obtained some important concessions, it by no means got all its own way. Grant and Marsh observed: 'It would seem, then, that a new interest group (the Warwickshire Conservation Society) with hardly any permanent staff can exert as much influence over a specific issue as the CBI.'
4 The Industry Act of 1972 was directed at regional development. The CBI was particularly concerned to prevent the government from having the right to buy shares in private industry. Its members were suspicious of any measures that might give the government more control over private industry. The TUC, on the other hand, favoured direct government investment, particularly in labour-intensive service industries, to ease the problem of unemployment. In practice, neither interest group appears to have had much influence, although the TUC were happier than the CBI with the final act. The government pursued a relatively independent policy, which was a response to 'the immediate demands of economic and political situations' rather than to the pressures of either interest group.

Grant and Marsh conclude that 'the CBI has little consistent direct influence over the policies pursued by government'. Despite its powerful membership and its access to the highest levels of government, 'the CBI's ability to influence events is limited by the government's need to retain the support of the electorate and by the activities of other interest groups'.

Pluralism and contemporary British politics

Although there have been no detailed studies of recent policies from a pluralist perspective, it is possible to argue that there is plenty of evidence of governments taking note of a variety of interest groups. It also appears that the government often follows policies supported by public opinion.

Although balancing a range of interests may not have been particularly typical of Margaret Thatcher's period as prime minister (1979-91), it has been more characteristic of John Major's period in office (1991-7), and that of Tony Blair (1997-). For example, John Major tried to balance the views of pro- and anti-Europeans by his policy of 'wait and see' over whether Britain should enter a single European currency. The 'New Labour' Party under Tony Blair has openly tried to respond to the views of a wide range of pressure groups and to take account of a range of sectional interests. His government has, for example, taken account of the views of trade unions by introducing minimum wage legislation and by giving unions a right to recognition by the employer where certain conditions are met.

On the other hand, the Blair government has not reinstated all the trade union laws repealed under the Conservatives – measures which would have been strongly opposed by the CBI and other groups. Furthermore, the Labour government has actively tried to include business leaders in the government and to take account of business interests and wishes.

In his 1999 budget speech, the chancellor of the exchequer tried to emphasize the even-handedness of the government's approach. He said:

> *With this last budget of the twentieth century, we ... leave behind the century-long sterile conflicts between governments of the left that have too often undervalued enterprise and wealth creation, and governments of the right, too often indifferent to public services and fairness.*
>
> Gordon Brown, quoted in *The Independent Budget Review*, 10 March 1999, p.12

In the budget there were cuts in Corporation Tax (which reflected the wishes of businesses); increases for pensioners (which reflected the wishes of many unions and groups such as Help the Aged); and increases in petrol prices (which pleased many environmental organizations, although hauliers demonstrated against the rises). Although not all pressure groups were pleased by the budget, it does appear to give an example of how a wide range of groups may have their views taken into account by contemporary governments.

Pluralism – a critique

A large body of evidence from studies such as those of Dahl in the US, and Hewitt and Grant and Marsh in Britain, appears to support the classical pluralist position. However, there are a number of serious criticisms of pluralism. These criticisms are concerned both with the methods pluralists use to measure power, and empirical evidence which seems to

contradict their claim that power is dispersed in Western democracies.

Non-decisions and safe decisions

Marxists and other conflict theorists have suggested that pluralists ignore some aspects of power. In particular it is argued that they concentrate exclusively on the first face of power, decision making.

John Urry (in Urry and Wakeford, 1973), for example, believes that pluralists ignore the possibility that some have the power to prevent certain issues from reaching the point of decision. As a result of this non-decision making, only safe decisions may be taken – decisions which do not fundamentally alter the basic structures of capitalist societies.

From this point of view, it is in the interests of the powerful to allow a variety of interest groups to influence safe decisions. This fosters the illusion of real participation and helps to create the myth that a society is democratic. It disguises the real basis of power and so protects the powerful.

Pluralists can also be criticized for ignoring what Steven Lukes (1974) has identified as the third face of power. They do not take account of the possibility that the preferences expressed in opinion polls or by pressure groups might themselves have been manipulated by those with real power. In Marxist terms, the decisions might reflect the false class consciousness of members of society who do not realize where their own true interests lie. Real power might therefore rest with those who control institutions such as the media and the education system, which can play a part in shaping individuals' attitudes and opinions.

The consequences of decisions

Other writers have identified further ways in which power can be measured. Westergaard and Resler argue that 'Power is visible only through its consequences' (Westergaard and Resler, 1976). Government legislation may fail to have its intended effect. Despite an abundance of legislation aimed at improving the lot of the poor, Westergaard and Resler believe that there has 'been little redistribution of wealth':

1 Studies of actual decisions might give the impression that the interests of the poor are represented in government decisions.
2 Studies of the results of those decisions might provide a very different picture.

In any case, many sociologists deny that governments in Western democracies monopolize power. A government might, for example, seek to reduce the level of unemployment in order to secure victory at the next election. However, it is not within the government's power to control all the actions of large corporations, who can decide whether to close existing factories, making some of their workforce redundant, or to invest their profits overseas. This may be increasingly true if some theorists of globalization are to be believed (see pp. 624–33).

Contradictory evidence

The above points pose fundamental questions about the pluralists' method of measuring power, but pluralism can also be criticized on its own terms. Some of the evidence suggests that some interest groups have more influence over government decisions than others. Decision making by governments does not always appear to support the view that power is equally distributed among all groups in society, or that the state acts impartially as an 'honest broker'.

In Britain, a study by David Marsh and David Locksley (1983) contradicts the evidence supporting pluralism, for it suggests that the interest groups representing industry have more influence than other groups with respect to some issues. For example, in 1978 the CBI was successful in discouraging the then Labour government from introducing legislation that would have resulted in workers sitting on the boards of companies. In a similar fashion in 1975, pressure from the CBI and the City of London played a major part in persuading the Labour government to drop proposals to nationalize the 25 largest industrial companies in Britain.

Marsh and Locksley also claim that trade unions have had a considerable amount of influence over legislation relating to prices and wages policies, and industrial relations, although they have had much less impact on other areas of government policy. In recent years, though, the influence of unions has certainly declined. It can be argued that the wishes of trade unions were consistently ignored by the governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major from 1979 to 1997. For some 18 years these pressure groups representing many millions of workers had very little influence on government decisions affecting them.

If anything, promotional groups seem to possess much less influence than protective groups. In a study of nuclear power policy, Hugh Ward (1983) found that 'the anti-nuclear movement in Britain has been very unsuccessful'. Interest groups such as Friends of the Earth failed to persuade successive governments not to build more nuclear power stations. Ward claims that the Central Electricity Generating Board, the UK Atomic Energy Authority, and GEC (General Electric Company) carried much more influence with those governments than the promotional pressure groups opposing expansion.

Although the British government has now stopped ordering new nuclear power stations, this may have

as much to do with the high costs of producing power using nuclear energy compared with more conventional sources. Other anti-nuclear campaigns have not enjoyed success in achieving their objectives. Despite the considerable support that the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) was able to gain in the 1980s, British governments went ahead with ordering Trident nuclear submarines as a replacement for Polaris. Thus it seems that, while governments may take account of the views of pressure groups, they may choose not to do so.

Unrepresented interests

Classical pluralists assume not only that interest groups have equal power, but also that all major interests in society are represented by one group or another. This latter assumption is also questionable.

The fairly recent emergence in Britain of consumer associations and citizens' advice bureaus can be seen as representing the interests of consumers against big business, and of citizens against government bureaucracies. It cannot be assumed that such interests were absent, unthreatened or adequately represented before the existence of such organizations. For instance, the unemployed are a group who, unlike employers and employees, still lack a protective pressure group to represent them.

Reappraisals of classical pluralism

It is not surprising that, given the strength and number of criticisms advanced against classical pluralism, some of its supporters have modified their positions. David Marsh originally provided evidence to support classical pluralism, but later rejected the pluralist approach in favour of what he describes as the fragmented elite model (Grant and Marsh, 1977, Marsh, 1983, Budge, McKay and Marsh, 1983).

Robert A. Dahl (1984) still supports the ideal of a pluralist democracy, but now accepts that it has certain dilemmas. He does not believe that the USA conforms perfectly to that ideal. The central dilemma is the unequal distribution of wealth and income. Dahl now argues that this provides an unequal distribution of power. Wealthy individuals find it easier to take an active and effective part in political life. He also notes that the owners and controllers of large corporations exercise considerable power in making decisions. Dahl therefore calls for increasing democratic control over business, and a reduction in inequalities in wealth and income.

Elite pluralism

Some pluralists, however, have responded to criticisms by adapting the theory to take account of some of the weaknesses of classical pluralism.

David Marsh has described a number of attempts to explain the distribution of power and the operation of the state as elite pluralist theories (Marsh, 1983). These theories share important similarities with classical pluralism:

1 They see Western societies as basically democratic.
2 They regard government as a process of compromise.
3 They agree that power is widely dispersed.

On the other hand:

1 They do not accept that all members of society have exactly the same amount of power.
2 They do not concentrate exclusively on the first face of power.
3 They see elites, the leaders of groups, as the main participants in decision making.

Representative elites – J.J. Richardson and A.G. Jordan

J.J. Richardson and A.G. Jordan (1979) have analysed the British government from an elite pluralist perspective. They argue that consultation among various groups has become the most important feature of British politics. Interest groups are not the only groups involved: government departments, and nationalized and private companies can also play an important part in the negotiations which determine policy. As far as possible the government tries to minimize the conflict between the representatives of organized groups, and to secure the agreement of the different sides concerned with a particular issue.

In these circumstances the participation of the mass of the population is not required to make a country democratic. Members, and indeed non-members of organizations, have their sectional interests represented by the elites, such as trade union leaders and the senior officials of promotional groups.

Unequal influence

However, Richardson and Jordan do not claim that all groups have equal power, or that all sections of society have groups to represent them. An important factor governing the degree of influence an interest group has is whether it is an insider or an outsider group:

1 Insider groups are accepted by the government as the legitimate representatives of a particular interest in society, and are regularly consulted on issues deemed relevant to them.
2 Outsider groups lack this recognition and are not automatically consulted.

According to Richardson and Jordan, the wishes of insider groups, such as the National Farmers' Union

and the CBI, carry more weight with the government than those of outside groups, such as CND.

Richardson and Jordan also point out that some groups in society are in a better position to take action to force policy changes on the government than others. In the 1970s the NUM exercised considerable power through the use and threatened use of strikes which posed serious problems for the government by endangering energy supplies.

In contrast, Richardson and Jordan are also prepared to admit that some interests are not effectively represented at all. While teachers have well-organized unions to represent their views to the government over educational issues, parents have no equivalent organizations.

Despite these apparent drawbacks to democracy in Britain, Richardson and Jordan believe that other factors ensure that the government does not ignore the interests of significant sections of the population. This is because groups who are neglected by the government tend to organize more to force the government to take their views into account.

For example, until comparatively recently, governments of most industrial societies showed little interest in environmental issues. When the problems of pollution and the destruction of the environment became more acute, new interest groups such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth sprang up to force these issues on to the political agenda. Situations where an interest in society is not represented will, therefore, be only temporary.

Measuring power

The elite pluralist position is also more sophisticated than classical pluralism in dealing with the problem of measuring power. Like classical pluralists, Richardson and Jordan stress the importance of examining decisions to determine whose wishes are being carried out. But they also examine the second face of power: they discuss who has influence over what issues reach the point of decision. They are prepared to accept that it is possible for well-organized groups to keep issues off the political agenda for a time.

To illustrate their point they quote an American study by M. Crenson. This study compared two Indiana cities, East Chicago and Gary, which had similar levels of air pollution resulting from industrial activity. In East Chicago, action was taken against this problem as early as 1949; whereas, in Gary, industrialists successfully prevented the problem from emerging as an issue until the middle of the 1950s. Gary relied heavily on one industry – steel – and the importance of this industry to the city persuaded officials not to take action.

Once again, though, Richardson and Jordan do not believe that non-decision making seriously undermines democracy. They claim that 'there is evidence that it is increasingly difficult to exercise this power'. They believe that in modern democracies it is possible for interest groups to force issues on to the political agenda even against the wishes of the government and other organized interests. Among the British examples they cite are those of the Smoke Abatement Society persuading the government to pass the Clean Air Act in 1956, and the Child Poverty Action Group reviving poverty as an issue in the early 1970s.

One reason why new issues can rapidly become important in the political arena is the existence of backbench MPs, who do not hold government office. They are keen to further their careers by showing their talents through advocating a new cause.

Wyn Grant – pressure groups and elite pluralism

In recent work, Wyn Grant (1999) has supported what is essentially an elite pluralist position. Focusing on the role of pressure groups he notes a number of important changes in British politics:

1 The power of the pressure groups – which were most influential in the 1970s – has declined. Thus the TUC and the CBI have lost their central role in discussions with the government, although they still retain some influence.

2 The number of pressure groups has greatly expanded so that very few interests can now claim to be unrepresented.

3 Pressure groups no longer focus so exclusively on Westminster and on changing government policy. There are now 'multiple arenas' in which they try to exert influence. These include the European Union and the courts, and in the future will include the devolved parliaments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Some pressure groups try to influence people's activities directly rather than trying to get the government to act. For example, the oil company Shell was persuaded not to dump its disused oil rig Brent Spar in the North Sea partly by boycotts of products encouraged by environmental pressure groups.

4 Linked to the above point is an increased use of various forms of direct action. Examples include the firebombing of milk tankers in Cheshire by radical, vegan, animal rights campaigners, the release of mink from mink farms by the Animal Liberation Front, the attempts by anti-roads campaigners to prevent road building, and the attempts of farmers to blockade ports to prevent the importation of Irish beef. Such methods have mixed results, but some, at least, are effective. Direct action not only gains publicity; it can

sometimes increase the costs of activities like building roads or farming mink so that economic disincentives are created.

5 Despite the increase in direct action, there has also been an increase in the number of pressure groups consulted by governments. Some groups previously regarded as outsider groups (such as Greenpeace) have become accepted by governments as suitable groups to consult over matters that concern them. Nevertheless, Grant still believes that a distinction between insider and outsider groups remains valid. Like other elite pluralists, he believes that insider groups tend to have more influence than outsider groups, although the latter group can sometimes achieve their objectives through direct action.

Grant concludes that, 'For all the talk of a "new" Britain and a "new" politics, there is much that looks like "business as usual" in the world of pressure group politics' (Grant, 1999). Pressure groups still help to ensure that Britain is essentially democratic, but it remains true that some groups have more influence than others.

Elite pluralism – a critique

Clearly, elite pluralism does answer some of the criticisms advanced against classical pluralism. It allows for the possibility that, at least temporarily, some interests may not be represented and some groups may have more power than others. It acknowledges that all individuals may not play an active part in politics, and it does not rely exclusively on measuring the first face of power, decision making. However, the analysis of elite pluralists may not be satisfactory in at least three ways:

1 In showing that democracies do not work perfectly, their own evidence raises doubts about the basic pluralist view that power is widely dispersed in Western industrial societies.
2 While they note the existence of elite leaders, they fail to discuss the possibility that these elites monopolize power and use it in their own interests.
3 Elite pluralists take account of two faces of power, but ignore the third. They do not discuss the power of some members of society to influence the wishes of others.

Elite theory

Elite theory differs from both pluralism and functionalism in that it sees power in society as being monopolized by a small minority. Elite theory sees society as divided into two main groups: a ruling minority who exercise power through the state, and the ruled.

There are, however, a number of ways in which elite theorists differ. They do not agree as to whether elite rule is desirable or beneficial for society; they differ in their conclusions about the inevitability of elite rule; and they do not agree about exactly who constitutes the elite or elites.

Classical elite theory

Elite theory was first developed by two Italian sociologists: Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923) and Gaetano Mosca (1858–1911). Both saw elite rule as inevitable and dismissed the possibility of a proletarian revolution leading to the establishment of a communist society. As such they were arguing against Marx's view of power and the state.

Because of the inevitability of elite rule neither saw it as desirable that any attempt should be made to end it. Pareto and Mosca agreed that the basis of elite rule was the superior personal qualities of those who made up the elites. Pareto believed that elites possessed more cunning or intelligence, while Mosca saw them as having more organizational ability. Since people were unequal, some would always have more ability than others, and would therefore occupy the elite positions in society.

According to both theorists, apart from the personal qualities of its members, an elite owes its power to its internal organization. It forms a united and cohesive minority in the face of an unorganized and fragmented mass. In Mosca's words, 'The power of the minority is irresistible as against each single individual in the majority.' Major decisions that affect society are taken by the elite. Even in so-called democratic societies, these decisions will usually reflect the concerns of the elite rather than the wishes of the people. Elite theorists picture the majority as apathetic and unconcerned with the major issues of the day. The mass of the population is largely controlled and manipulated by the elite, passively accepting the propaganda which justifies elite rule.

Although there are broad similarities between the work of these classical elite theorists, there are also some differences.

Vilfredo Pareto

Pareto (1963, first published 1915-19) placed particular emphasis on psychological characteristics as the basis of elite rule. He argued that there are two main types of governing elite, which (following his

intellectual ancestor and countryman, Machiavelli) he called lions and foxes:

1 Lions achieve power because of their ability to take direct and incisive action, and, as their name suggests, they tend to rule by force. Military dictatorships provide an example of this type of governing elite.
2 By comparison, foxes rule by cunning and guile, by diplomatic manipulation and wheeling and dealing. Pareto believed that European democracies provided an example of this type of elite.

Members of a governing elite owe their positions primarily to their personal qualities – either to their lion-like or fox-like characteristics.

Major change in society occurs when one elite replaces another – a process Pareto called the circulation of elites. All elites tend to become decadent. They 'decay in quality' and lose their 'vigour'. They may become soft and ineffective with the pleasures of easy living and the privileges of power, or too set in their ways and too inflexible to respond to changing circumstances.

In addition, each type of elite lacks the qualities of its counterpart – qualities which in the long run are essential to maintain power. An elite of lions lacks the imagination and cunning necessary to maintain its rule and will have to admit foxes from the masses to make up for this deficiency. Gradually foxes infiltrate the entire elite and so transform its character. Foxes, however, lack the ability to take forceful and decisive action, which at various times is essential to retain power. An organized minority of lions committed to the restoration of strong government develops and eventually overthrows the elite of foxes.

Whereas, to Marx, history ultimately leads to and ends with the communist utopia, to Pareto, history is a never-ending circulation of elites. Nothing ever really changes and history is, and always will be, 'a graveyard of aristocracies'.

A critique of Pareto

Pareto's view of history is both simple and simplistic. He dismisses the differences between political systems such as Western democracies, communist single-party states, fascist dictatorships and feudal monarchies as merely variations on a basic theme. All are essentially examples of elite rule and, in comparison with this fact, the differences between them are minor.

Pareto fails to provide a method of measuring and distinguishing between the supposedly superior qualities of elites. He simply assumes that the qualities of the elite are superior to those of the mass. His criterion for distinguishing between lions and foxes is merely his own interpretation of the style of elite rule.

Nor does Pareto provide a way of measuring the process of elite decadence. He does suggest, however, that if an elite is closed to recruitment from below it is likely to rapidly lose its vigour and vitality and have a short life. Yet, as T.B. Bottomore (1993) notes, the Brahmins – the elite stratum in the Indian caste system – were a closed group which survived for many hundreds of years.

Gaetano Mosca

Like Pareto, Gaetano Mosca (1939) believed that rule by a minority was an inevitable feature of social life. He based this belief on the evidence of history, claiming that in all societies:

> *two classes of people appear – a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first.*
>
> Mosca, 1939

Like Pareto, Mosca believed that the ruling minority were superior to the mass of the population. He claimed that they were 'distinguished from the mass of the governed by qualities that give them a certain material, intellectual or even moral superiority', and he provided a sociological explanation for this superiority, seeing it as a product of the social background of the elite.

Unlike Pareto, who believed that the qualities required for elite rule were the same for all time, Mosca argued that they varied from society to society. For example, in some societies courage and bravery in battle provide access to the elite; in others the skills and capacities needed to acquire wealth.

Elite theory and democracy

Pareto saw modern democracies as merely another form of elite domination. He scornfully dismissed those who saw them as a more progressive and representative system of government. Mosca, however, particularly in his later writings, argued that there were important differences between democracies and other forms of elite rule. By comparison with closed systems such as caste and feudal societies, the ruling elite in democratic societies is open. There is therefore a greater possibility of an elite drawn from a wide range of social backgrounds. As a result, the interests of various social groups may be represented in the decisions taken by the elite. The majority may therefore have some control over the government of society.

As he became more favourably disposed towards democracy, Mosca argued that 'the modern

representative state has made it possible for almost all political forces, almost all social values, to participate in the management of society'. But he stopped short of a literal acceptance of Abraham Lincoln's famous definition of democracy as 'government of the people, by the people, for the people' (quoted in Bottomore, 1993). To Mosca, democracy was government of the people; it might even be government for the people, but it could never be government by the people. Elite rule remained inevitable. Democracy could be no more than representative government, with an elite representing the interests of the people.

Despite his leanings towards democracy, Mosca retained his dim view of the masses. They lacked the capacity for self-government and required the leadership and guidance of an elite. Indeed Mosca regretted the extension of the franchise to all members of society, believing that it should be limited to the middle class. He thus remained 'elitist' to the last.

Elite theory and the USA – C. Wright Mills

Whereas Pareto and Mosca attempted to provide a general theory to explain the nature and distribution of power in all societies, the American sociologist C. Wright Mills (1956) presented a less ambitious and less wide-ranging version of elite theory. He limited his analysis to American society in the 1950s.

Unlike the early elite theorists, Mills did not believe that elite rule was inevitable; in fact he saw it as a fairly recent development in the USA. Unlike Pareto, who rather cynically accepted the domination of the masses by elites, Mills soundly condemned it. Since he saw elite rule as based upon the exploitation of the masses, he adopted a conflict version of elite theory. Because the elites and the masses had different interests, this created the potential for conflict between the two groups.

The power elite

Writing in the 1950s, Mills explained elite rule in institutional rather than psychological terms. He rejected the view that members of the elite had superior qualities or psychological characteristics which distinguished them from the rest of the population. Instead he argued that the structure of institutions was such that those at the top of the institutional hierarchy largely monopolized power. Certain institutions occupied key pivotal positions in society and the elite comprised those who held 'command posts' in those institutions.

Mills identified three key institutions:

1 the major corporations
2 the military
3 the federal government

Those who occupied the command posts in these institutions formed three elites. In practice, however, the interests and activities of the elites were sufficiently similar and interconnected to form a single ruling majority, which Mills termed the power elite. Thus the power elite involved the 'coincidence of economic, military and political power'. For example, Mills claimed that 'American capitalism is now in considerable part military capitalism.' As tanks, guns and missiles poured from the factories, the interests of both the economic and military elites were served. In the same way, Mills argued that business and government 'cannot now be seen as two distinct worlds'. He referred to political leaders as 'lieutenants' of the economic elite, and claimed that their decisions systematically favoured the interests of the giant corporations.

The net result of the coincidence of economic, military and political power was a power elite which dominated American society and took all decisions of major national and international importance.

Elite unity

However, things had not always been so. The power elite owed its dominance to a change in the 'institutional landscape'.

In the nineteenth century economic power was fragmented among a multitude of small businesses. By the 1950s, it was concentrated in the hands of a few hundred giant corporations 'which together hold the keys to economic decision'.

Political power was similarly fragmented and localized and, in particular, state legislatures had considerable independence in the face of a weak central government. The federal government eroded the autonomy of the states, and political power became increasingly centralized.

The growing threat of international conflict led to a vast increase in the size and power of the military. The local, state-controlled militia were replaced by a centrally-directed military organization.

These developments led to a centralization of decision-making power. As a result, power was increasingly concentrated in the hands of those in the command posts of the key institutions.

According to Mills, the cohesiveness and unity of the power elite were strengthened by the similarity of the social backgrounds of its members and the interchange and overlapping of personnel between the three elites. Members were drawn largely from the upper stratum of society; they were mainly Protestant, native-born Americans, from urban areas in the eastern USA. They shared similar educational backgrounds and mixed socially in the same high-prestige clubs. As a result, they tended to share similar values and sympathies,

which provided a basis for mutual trust and cooperation.

Within the power elite there was frequent interchange of personnel between the three elites: a corporation director might become a politician and vice versa. At any one time, individuals might have footholds in more than one elite.

Elite dominance

Mills argued that American society was dominated by a power elite of 'unprecedented power and unaccountability'. He claimed that momentous decisions such as the American entry into the Second World War and the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima were made by the power elite with little or no reference to the people.

Despite the fact that such decisions affected all members of society, the power elite was not accountable for its actions, either directly to the public or to any body which represented the public interest. Mills saw no real differences between the two major political parties – the Democrats and the Republicans – and therefore the public was not provided with a choice of alternative policies.

In Mills's analysis, the bulk of the population was pictured as a passive and quiescent mass controlled by the power elite which subjected it to 'instruments of psychic management and manipulation'. Excluded from the command posts of power, the 'man in the mass' was told what to think, what to feel, what to do and what to hope for by a mass media directed by the elite. Unconcerned with the major issues of the day, 'he' was preoccupied with 'his' personal world of work, leisure, family and neighbourhood. Free from popular control, the power elite pursued its own concerns – power and self-aggrandizement.

Elite self-recruitment in Britain

C. Wright Mills's view of the elites in the USA can also be applied to Britain. A number of researchers have found that the majority of those who occupy elite positions in Britain are recruited from the minority of the population with highly privileged backgrounds. This appears to apply to a wide range of British elites, including politicians, judges, higher civil servants, senior military officers, and the directors of large companies and major banks. There are high levels of elite self-recruitment: the children of elite members are particularly likely to be themselves recruited to elite positions.

There is also evidence that there may be some degree of cohesion within and between the various elites. Individuals may occupy positions within more than one elite: cabinet ministers and other MPs may hold directorships in large companies. Individuals may move between the elites: the former businessman Geoffrey Robinson became a minister in Tony Blair's first cabinet in 1997. Directors may also sit on the boards of a number of different companies.

Elites are also likely to have a common educational background: many members of elites attended public schools and went to Oxford or Cambridge University. John Rex argues that this type of education serves to socialize future top decision makers into a belief in the legitimacy of the status quo. It creates the possibility that the elites will be able to act together to protect their own interests. Rex suggests:

> *the whole system of 'Establishment' education has been used to ensure a common mind on the legitimacy of the existing order of things among those who have to occupy positions of power and decision.*
>
> Rex, 1974

The following studies provide evidence for the existence of such elites in Britain.

'Top decision makers'

In a study conducted in the 1970s, Tom Lupton and Shirley Wilson traced the kinship and marital connections of six categories of 'top decision makers'. These categories were ministers, senior civil servants, and directors of the Bank of England, the big five banks, city firms and insurance companies (Lupton and Wilson, 1973).

Lupton and Wilson constructed 24 kinship diagrams, usually covering three generations and indicating relationships by birth and marriage. Seventy-three of the top decision makers appeared on these diagrams, accounting for 18 per cent of the total number of people included in the 24 extended-family groupings. Clearly there were close kinship and marital ties between the elites examined, and certain families were disproportionately represented in the ranks of top decision makers.

Members of Parliament

Table 9.1 shows the result of research by George Borthwick *et al.* into the educational background of Conservative MPs. It compares the new MPs elected in the 1979, 1983 and 1987 elections with those first elected to Parliament before 1979, but who remained MPs after the 1979 election. It therefore highlights changes in background. It shows some decline in the number of public school-educated MPs, but nevertheless over half of the 1987 entry had been to public schools and 44 per cent had been to Oxford or Cambridge University.

John Scott (1991) points out that cabinets, particularly Conservative ones, are even more educationally unrepresentative than the House of Commons as a

whole. For example, four-fifths of Mrs Thatcher's 1983 cabinet were educated at public schools (no less than one-third of whom had been to Eton and Winchester).

The 1997 general election did lead to a substantial change in the make-up of the House of Commons. Research by David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh (1997) reveals that there was a much higher proportion of public-school-educated MPs in the Conservative Party than in the Labour Party which formed the government. As Table 9.2 shows, 67 of

Table 9.1 Educational background of Conservative MPs

	Number	Public school %	Eton %	Oxford %	Cambridge %	Other universities %
Pre-1979	261	75	17	30	25	17
1979 entry	78	59	14	21	14	32
1983 entry	104	55	6	19	19	38
1987 entry	57	53	7	30	14	32

Source: G. Borthwick, D. Ellingworth, C. Bell and D. Mackenzie (1991) 'The social background of British MPs', *Social Trends*, November, p. 71.

Table 9.2 Educational background of candidates, 1997 election

	Labour		Conservative		Liberal Democrat	
	Elected	Defeated	Elected	Defeated	Elected	Defeated
Type of education						
Elementary	–	–	–	–	–	–
Elementary +	2	–	–	–	–	–
Secondary	48	19	5	48	5	66
Secondary+ Poly/College	86	54	9	74	6	162
Secondary + University	215	120	42	154	16	253
Public school	2	–	9	17	1	8
Public school + Poly/College	5	4	9	28	2	10
Public school + University	60	24	91	154	16	94
TOTAL	418	221	165	475	46	593
Oxford	41	11	46	59	11	38
Cambridge	20	16	38	45	4	25
Other universities	214	117	49	204	17	284
All universities	275 (66%)	144 (65%)	133 (81%)	308 (65%)	32 (70%)	347 (59%)
Eton	2	–	15	20	1	–
Harrow	–	–	–	5	–	–
Winchester	1	–	1	3	–	–
Other public schools	64	28	93	169	18	102
All public schools	67 (16%)	28 (13%)	109 (66%)	197 (42%)	19 (41%)	102 (17%)

Source: D. Butler and D. Kavanagh (1997) *The British General Election of 1997*, Macmillan: Basingstoke, p. 203.

the 418 Labour MPs elected had been to public schools (just two of these had been to Eton), and 109 of the 165 successful Conservative candidates were public-school-educated. Thus 16 per cent of Labour MPs were educated at public schools compared to 66 per cent of Conservative MPs. Nevertheless, even in the Labour Party those with public school backgrounds were over-represented compared to in the population as a whole. There were also high proportions of MPs who had attended Britain's elite universities, Oxford and Cambridge: 61 Labour and 84 Conservative MPs were Oxbridge graduates.

The occupational backgrounds of MPs elected in 1997 were by no means exclusively from elite groups. A wide range of professions was represented. Nevertheless, the Labour cabinet did include wealthy members of the business elite such as Geoffrey Robinson and Lord Sainsbury. As Table 9.3 shows, there were very few MPs with manual occupations. Even in the Labour Party – traditionally the party of the working class – only 13 per cent of their MPs had manual jobs; and the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats each had only a single MP with a manual occupation.

Overall there is no doubt that the election of over 400 Labour candidates reduced the domination of the House of Commons by members of elites, but that did not mean there were not still significant numbers of people from elite backgrounds in Parliament and in government.

Elite theory in the USA and Britain – an evaluation

The evidence provided by C. Wright Mills and by numerous researchers in Britain has shown that those occupying elite positions have tended to come from privileged backgrounds, and that there have been important connections between different elites. However, the significance of these findings is open to dispute.

Some Marxists claim that they provide evidence for a ruling class based upon economic power, rather than a ruling elite based upon the occupation of 'command posts'.

Furthermore, it has been argued that these versions of elite theory fail to measure power adequately: they do not show that these elites actually have power, nor that they exercise power in their own interests against the interests of the majority of the population.

Robert A. Dahl (1973) has criticized Mills from a pluralist perspective. He claimed that Mills had simply shown that the power elite had the 'potential for control'. By occupying the command posts of major institutions it would certainly appear that its members have this potential. But, as Dahl argued, the potential for control was not 'equivalent to actual control'. Dahl maintained that actual control can only be shown to exist 'by examination of a series of concrete cases where key decisions are made: decisions on taxation and expenditures, subsidies, welfare programs, military policy and so on'. If it can then be shown that a minority has the power to decide such issues and to overrule opposition to its policies, then the existence of a power elite will have been established. Dahl claimed that, by omitting to investigate a range of key decisions, Mills failed to establish where 'actual control' lies. As a result, Dahl argued that the case for a power elite remains unproven.

Dahl's criticism of C. Wright Mills applies with equal force to British studies of elite self-recruitment. Furthermore, the British studies make no attempt to measure the second and third faces of power (they make no reference to non-decision making nor do they discuss how the wishes of the population may be manipulated by elites). As such, studies of elite self-recruitment may reveal something about patterns of social mobility but they provide little direct evidence about who actually has power.

Both C. Wright Mills's work and most British studies of elite self-recruitment are very dated. Studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s are thin on the ground. Some of the more recent research on political elites, which we discussed earlier, and work by John Scott on the 'upper class' (see pp. 51–5) suggest that elite self-recruitment is still common in Britain, but the evidence only covers a limited range of elites.

Fragmented elites – government in Britain

A distinctive elite theory of power and the state is provided by Ian Budge, David McKay and David Marsh (1983). Along with C. Wright Mills they accept that elite rule takes place in modern democracies, but they deny that the elite is a united group. Rather they believe that there are a large number of different fragmented elites which compete for power. They state that 'The evidence points to a variety of groups, interests and organizations all exercising considerable influence over policies but divided internally and externally.'

Budge *et al.* deny that power is concentrated only in the hands of a state elite centred on the prime minister and the cabinet. They point out that political parties may be divided between different factions or groups. Traditionally there have always been divisions between the 'left wing' and 'right wing' of

Table 9.3 Occupational background of candidates, 1997 election

	Labour Elected	Labour Defeated	Conservative Elected	Conservative Defeated	Liberal Democrat Elected	Liberal Democrat Defeated
Professions						
Barrister	12	7	20	47	4	6
Solicitor	17	11	9	41	2	27
Doctor/dentist/optician	3	2	2	4	4	11
Architect/surveyor	–	–	2	9	–	7
Civil/chartered engineer	3	2	–	4	1	10
Accountant	2	2	3	24	1	26
Civil service/local government	30	19	5	7	2	28
Armed services	–	–	9	10	1	11
Teachers:						
University	22	4	1	3	2	19
Polytechnic/college	35	17	–	2	1	19
School	54	37	7	19	4	85
Other consultancies	3	4	2	1	1	10
Scientific/research	7	2	1	2	–	7
TOTAL	188 (45%)	107 (48%)	61 (37%)	173 (36%)	23 (50%)	266 (45%)
Business						
Company director	7	3	17	51	2	25
Company executive	9	13	36	90	7	66
Commerce/insurance	2	9	7	33	1	39
Management/clerical	15	8	1	15	1	30
General business	4	7	4	22	–	41
TOTAL	37 (9%)	40 (18%)	65 (39%)	211 (44%)	11 (24%)	201 (34%)
Miscellaneous						
Miscellaneous white collar	69	29	2	16	1	57
Politician/political organizer	40	9	15	20	5	13
Publisher/journalist	29	10	14	27	4	18
Farmer	1	2	5	13	1	7
Housewife	–	–	2	4	–	9
Student	–	4	–	2	–	8
TOTAL	139 (33%)	54 (24%)	38 (23%)	82 (17%)	11 (24%)	112 (19%)
Manual workers						
Miner	12	–	1	–	–	–
Skilled worker	40	20	–	9	1	14
Semi/unskilled	2	–	–	–	–	–
TOTAL	(13%)	(9%)	(1%)	(2%)	(2%)	(2%)
GRAND TOTAL	418	221	165	475	46	593

Source: D. Butler and D. Kavanagh (1997) *The British General Election of 1997*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, p. 205.

the Labour Party over issues such as how many industries should be nationalized. Budge *et al.* claim that there were similar divisions in Conservative cabinets in the early 1980s, between supporters of Thatcherite policies and the 'wets', urging a more cautious approach.

Furthermore, governments cannot always rely on the support of backbench MPs: in the 1974-9 Labour government only 19 per cent of Labour MPs did not vote against government policy at some time. To complicate matters even further, the House of Lords has the power to delay, and sometimes effectively kill, legislation.

For these reasons, Budge *et al.* claim that elites within Parliament are too divided to be able to be the dominant force in British politics.

These divisions are further increased by the civil service. Ministers tend to rely on their civil servants for information and advice, to be guided by civil servants, and to develop departmental loyalties. Those representing spending ministries such as education and defence may, as a result, compete with each other to gain a larger share of the total government budget. Civil servants also have more direct methods of exercising power. Even when decisions have been reached, they have considerable room for manoeuvre in interpreting and implementing them.

Budge *et al.* use a very broad definition of the state. To them it includes not only central government, but also local government and a range of semi-independent institutions and organizations. Local government, they argue, has both the ability and the will to challenge central authority. For example, Britain continues to have a considerable number of local education authorities which retain at least some grammar schools, despite the attempts of successive Labour governments to abolish them.

Further constraints on central government stem from the independence of the judiciary and the police. Judges have considerable discretion in interpreting the law, to the extent that they can have a major impact upon the effects of government legislation. To give just one example, judicial decisions have limited the scope of the Race Relations Act of 1971 so that it does not outlaw racial discrimination in private clubs. The police have almost as much independence. Budge *et al.* point out that chief constables 'are wholly responsible for all decisions' in their force. If senior police officers do not effectively enforce a particular law, government decisions will have little impact.

Yet another important limitation on the government is the existence of a large number of Quangos (Quasi-Autonomous Non-Governmental Organizations). These range from organizations such as the Jockey Club, to the Trustees of National Museums, the BBC and nationalized industries. Although most of these organizations rely to some extent on government funding, they still have freedom to take an independent line. For example, at times the BBC has broadcast programmes against the wishes of, or critical of, the government.

According to this view, then, there are a wide variety of elites within what can be broadly defined as the state, who limit the degree of power held by the government. But Budge *et al.* do not see power as confined to the state. In common with elite pluralists they point out that some pressure groups have considerable power. In particular, the unions have sometimes been able to thwart the government through strikes, while the CBI and financiers have been able to veto some governmental decisions by using their financial power.

The government also has to contend with the elites of international organizations such as NATO and the EC (now the EU), and it is bound by the decisions of the Court of Justice of the EC. In 1976, for example, the British government was forced by that court to introduce tachographs (which can read whether the drivers have broken EC regulations) into commercial vehicles.

Summary and critique

The fragmented elite theory sees power resting with a very wide variety of elites, government ministers, backbench MPs, senior civil servants, officials in local government, the chairpersons of nationalized industries, the leaders of other quangos, senior judges and police officers, top union officials, powerful business people, and those occupying the senior positions in international organizations to which Britain belongs. Since the elite are fragmented and divided rather than cohesive and united, Budge *et al.* do not believe that any single group in society monopolizes power. They would agree with pluralists that a wide variety of groups and interests are represented in society, but they would disagree that this adds up to a truly democratic government. As they put it, 'fragmentation does not guarantee effective popular control'.

Budge *et al.* may exaggerate the extent to which some elites act independently of political leaders. Since their study was published in 1983 the number of quangos in Britain has rapidly increased. For example, new funding councils for various parts of the welfare state have been introduced, along with NHS trusts, and some schools and all colleges have become formally independent of local authorities and the national government. Yet most such quangos still rely very heavily on government funding and in many the government has a role in appointing officials.

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) is a case in point. This organization determines the funding of further education and sixth-form colleges, and as such appears to have considerable power. However, its members are not elected: they are directly appointed by the government. In 1994, two of its members were former Conservative politicians and four were businessmen, including Anthony Close from Forte – a business which contributed £80,500 to the Conservative Party in 1992.

The government not only determines the personnel involved, it also sets the overall budget and has directly intervened in the affairs of the FEFC by, for example, withholding funds from colleges unless they persuaded their staff to accept new contracts. Thus, while quangos might seem to produce independent elites, which can come into conflict with the political elite, their autonomy can sometimes be illusory, with the governmental elite remaining the dominant force.

The fragmented elite theory is also open to the same criticisms as the work of C. Wright Mills. It tends to assume that those in elite positions actually exercise power. Budge *et al.* back their analysis up with numerous examples but do not provide systematic evidence on the basis of distinguishing the three faces of power.

Marxists and some other conflict theorists would claim that all elite theory fails to identify the underlying basis for power. In particular, Marxists argue that power derives from wealth in the form of owning the means of production, rather than from the occupation of senior positions in society. We will examine Marxist views on power and the state in the next section.

Power and the state – Marxist perspectives

Marxist perspectives, like elite theory, see power as concentrated in the hands of a minority in society. Marxist theorists also agree with those elite theorists who see power being used to further the interests of the powerful.

Marxist theories stress that the powerful and the powerless have different interests and that these differences may lead to conflict in society. Unlike elite theory, though, Marxist approaches do not assume that power rests with those who occupy key positions in the state. They see the source of power as lying elsewhere in society. In particular, Marxists put primary emphasis upon economic resources as a source of power.

A wide variety of Marxist theories of power have been developed. We start this section by examining the work of Marx himself, and his friend and collaborator Engels, before going on to consider the views of those who have developed less orthodox Marxist views.

Marx and Engels on power and the state

According to Marx, power is concentrated in the hands of those who have economic control within a society (Marx 1974, 1978; Marx and Engels, 1950b). From this perspective, the source of power lies in the economic infrastructure:

1 In all class-divided societies the means of production are owned and controlled by the ruling class. This relationship to the means of production provides the basis of its dominance. It therefore follows that the only way to return power to the people involves communal ownership of the means of production.

2 In a communist society, power would be more equally distributed amongst the whole of the population, since the means of production would be communally owned rather than owned by individuals.

As we have seen in previous chapters, in capitalist society ruling-class power is used to exploit and oppress the subject class, and much of the wealth produced by the proletariat's labour power is appropriated in the form of profit or surplus value by the bourgeoisie. From a Marxist perspective, the use of power to exploit others is defined as coercion. It is seen as an illegitimate use of power since it forces the subject class to submit to a situation which is against its interests. If ruling-class power is accepted as legitimate by the subject class, this is an indication of false class consciousness.

Ruling-class power extends beyond specifically economic relationships. In terms of Marxist theory, the relationships of domination and subordination in the infrastructure will largely be reproduced in the superstructure (see p. 11 for a definition of these terms). The state (as part of the superstructure) reflects the distribution of power in society. The decisions and activities of the state will favour the interests of the ruling class rather than those of the population as a whole.

Despite the general thrust of the arguments of Marx and Engels, there are, as we will see, some inconsistencies in their statements about the state.

The origins and evolution of the state

Engels claimed that in primitive communist societies the state did not exist. Kinship (or family relationships) formed the basis of social groupings (Engels 1884, in Marx and Engels, 1950b). These societies were essentially agricultural, and no surplus was produced beyond what was necessary for subsistence. It was therefore impossible for large amounts of wealth to be accumulated and concentrated in the hands of a few. There was little division of labour, and the means of production were communally owned.

Only when societies began to produce a surplus did it become possible for a ruling class to emerge. Once one group in society became economically dominant, a state developed.

Engels believed that the state was necessary to 'hold class antagonisms in check'. In primitive communist societies all individuals shared the same interests; in class societies, a minority benefited from the existing social system at the expense of the majority. According to Engels, the exploited majority had to be held down to prevent them from asserting their interests and threatening the position of the ruling class. Thus in ancient Athens the 90,000 Athenian citizens used the state as a method of repressing the 365,000 slaves.

The simplest way the state could control the subject class was through the use of force or coercion. Engels pointed to the police, the prisons and the army as state-run institutions used to repress the exploited members of society.

Engels believed that coercion was the main type of power used to control the population in early states. In ancient Athens and Rome, and the feudal states of the Middle Ages, ruling-class control of the state was clearly apparent. For example, the feudal state consisted exclusively of landowners; serfs possessed neither private property nor political rights.

However, Engels believed that more advanced forms of the state were less obviously a coercive tool of the ruling class. Indeed, Engels described democracies as the 'highest form of state', for with such a state all members of society appear to have equal political power. Each individual in societies with universal suffrage can vote, and in theory therefore has as much influence over government policy as every other individual. According to Engels, this would tend to mean that the existing social order would be perceived as fair, just and legitimate, since the state would be seen to reflect the wishes of the population. As such, the state would not need to rely so heavily on the use of force: in most cases the authority of the state would be accepted by the population.

In reality, however, Engels believed that democracy was an illusion. Real power continued to rest with the owners of the means of production, and not with the population as a whole.

One way in which the ruling class could ensure that the state continued to act in its interest was through corruption. Troublesome officials who threatened to follow policies harmful to the bourgeoisie could be bribed. A second way to determine government policies was through the use of the financial power of capitalists. The state often relied upon borrowing money from the bourgeoisie in order to meet its debts. Loans could be withheld if the state refused to follow policies beneficial to the bourgeoisie.

The end of the state

Marx and Engels did not believe that the state would be a permanent feature of society. Since they believed its purpose was to protect the position of the ruling class and to control the subject class, they argued that it would become redundant once classes disappeared. In the immediate aftermath of the proletarian revolution, the proletariat would seize control of the state. They would use it to consolidate their position, establish communal ownership of the means of production, and destroy the power of the bourgeoisie. Once these objectives had been achieved, class division would no longer exist, and the state would 'wither away'.

The views of Marx and Engels on the state are neatly summed up in the *Communist Manifesto*, where they say 'The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' (Marx and Engels, 1950a, first published 1848).

However, Engels did accept that in certain circumstances the state could play an independent role in society, where its actions would not be completely controlled by a single class. Engels argued that, at particular points in history, two classes could have roughly equal power. He claimed that in some monarchies of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe the landowning aristocracy and the rising bourgeoisie were in opposition to each other and both were equally powerful. In this situation the state could take an independent line since the warring classes effectively cancelled each other out.

Furthermore, in his more empirical studies Marx recognized that there might be divisions within states in capitalist countries. For example, in *The Class Struggles in France 1848–1850* (Marx, in Marx and Engels, 1950a), Marx acknowledged a difference in interests between finance capitalists on the one hand and the industrial bourgeoisie on the other. Finance capitalists (many of whom were large landowners) had an interest in the government of France retaining the huge debt it had at the time, since financiers

could benefit from lending money to the French state. On the other hand, the industrial bourgeoisie were being harmed by the taxes needed to service the debt.

Marx and Engels inspired many later Marxists to devote a great deal of attention to the study of power and the state, but their original work is sometimes vague, and is sometimes inconsistent. It has been interpreted in different ways. Furthermore, the work of the founders of Marxism has not been entirely free from criticism from more contemporary sociologists adopting this perspective. Consequently a number of contrasting Marxist theories of the state have been developed. These differ over the precise way in which they see the bourgeoisie controlling the state, the extent to which they believe the state enjoys independence from ruling-class control, and the importance they attach to this institution for maintaining the predominance of the bourgeoisie in capitalist societies.

Ralph Miliband – the capitalist state

The British sociologist Ralph Miliband (1969) followed Marx and Engels in seeing power as being derived from wealth. He rejected the pluralist view that in 'democracies' equal political rights give each member of the population equal power. He referred to political equality as 'one of the great myths of the epoch' and claimed that genuine political equality was 'impossible in the conditions of advanced capitalism' because of the power of those who own and control the means of production.

Miliband followed conventional definitions of the state, seeing it as consisting of the institutions of the police, the judiciary, the military, local government, central government, the administration or bureaucracy, and parliamentary assemblies. He believed that it was through these institutions that 'power is wielded', and that this power was exercised in the interests of the ruling class.

Miliband believed that the state could sometimes act as the direct tool or instrument of those who possess economic power. They used it to preserve their economic dominance, maintain their political power and stabilize capitalist society by preventing threats to their position. However, Miliband did accept that in some circumstances direct intervention by the wealthy was not necessary in order for the state to act in their interests.

Elites and the ruling class

To Miliband the state was run by a number of elites who ran the central institutions. These elites included cabinet ministers, MPs, senior police and military officers, and top judges. Together he saw them as largely acting to defend the ruling class or bourgeoisie: he believed that all the elites shared a basic interest in the preservation of capitalism and the defence of private property. In some ways Miliband's views are similar to those of the elite theorist C. Wright Mills, but Miliband sees elites as acting in the interests of capitalists and not just in their own interests.

Miliband attempted to justify his claims by presenting a wide range of empirical evidence:

1 First, he tried to show that many of those who occupy elite positions are themselves members of the bourgeoisie. For example, he pointed out that in America, from 1899 until 1949, 60 per cent of cabinet members were businessmen, and this occupational group also made up about 33 per cent of British cabinets between 1886 and 1950.

2 Obviously the above figures do leave a considerable proportion of the state elite who are not from business backgrounds. To take account of this point, Miliband advanced his second type of evidence, which attempts to show that the non-business person in the state elite will, in any case, act in the interests of the bourgeoisie. He argued that groups such as politicians, senior civil servants and judges are 'united by ties of kinship, friendship, common outlook, and mutual interest'. The vast majority come from upper- or middle-class families. Most share similar educational backgrounds since they have attended public schools and Oxford or Cambridge University. As such they have been socialized into identifying with the interests of the ruling class. Furthermore, even those few recruits to elite positions who come from working-class backgrounds will only have gained promotion by adopting the values of the ruling class. They will have undergone a process of bourgeoisification, and will have come to think and act as if they were members of the bourgeoisie.

3 Third, Miliband claimed to be able to show that the actions of the state elites have, in practice, tended to benefit the ruling class. He pointed out that judges saw one of their primary duties as the protection of private property. He suggested that Labour governments have done little to challenge the dominance of the ruling class. Although the 1945 Labour government nationalized a number of industries, it stopped far short of what many of its supporters would have wished. The existing owners were generously compensated, and the appointment of business people to run the industries meant that they were operated in a capitalistic way which, if anything, assisted private industry.

Legitimation

Miliband also advanced an explanation as to why the majority of the population should accept a state which acts against their interests. He examined various ways in which the subject class was

persuaded to accept the status quo. In effect, he considered the third face of power, claiming that the economic power of the ruling class enabled them to partly shape the beliefs and wishes of the remainder of the population. He believed that this took place through the process of legitimation, which he regarded as a system of 'massive indoctrination'. Miliband argued that the capitalist class sought to:

> *persuade society not only to accept the policies it advocates but also the ethos, the values and the goals which are its own, the economic system of which it is the central part, the 'way of life' which is the core of its being*
>
> Miliband, 1969, p. 211

Miliband illustrated his argument with an analysis of advertising, by means of which capitalist enterprises promote both their products and the 'acceptable face' of capitalism. He argued that all advertising is political since it serves to further the power and privilege of the dominant class. Through advertisements, giant, privately-owned corporations, such as ICI, BICC, Unilever, ITT and the major banks and oil companies, promote the view that their major concern is public service and the welfare of the community. Profits are a secondary consideration and portrayed mainly as a means of providing an improved service.

The image of the corporation and its products is made even rosier by association in advertisements with 'socially approved values and norms'. Miliband argued that capitalism and its commodities are subtly linked via advertisements to 'integrity, reliability, security, parental love, child-like innocence, neighbourliness, sociability'. With these kinds of associations, the exploitative and oppressive nature of capitalism is effectively disguised.

Finally, advertising promotes the view that the way to happiness and fulfilment involves the accumulation of material possessions – in particular, the acquisition of the products of capitalism. The individual is encouraged to 'be content to enjoy the blessings which are showered upon him' by the 'benevolent, public-spirited and socially responsible' capitalist enterprise.

Miliband argued that advertising provides one example of the ways in which capitalism is legitimated. He regarded the process of legitimation as essential for the maintenance of capitalist power. If successful, it prevents serious challenge to the basis of that power: the private ownership of the means of production. In the following chapters, we will examine further aspects of the process of legitimation in detail.

To sum up, Miliband argued that there is direct interference by members of ruling elites in the state. Their dominance is further cemented through the socialization of state personnel from non-elite backgrounds into the values of the elite, and the manipulation of the beliefs of the mass of the population so that they will lend support to pro-capitalist policies.

Nicos Poulantzas – a structuralist view of the state

Nicos Poulantzas (1969, 1976) has criticized Miliband's view of the state and has provided an alternative Marxist interpretation which places less stress on the actions of individuals and more on the role of social structure. A structuralist approach emphasizes the importance of social structure, and minimizes the importance of the actions of individuals in society. As such, Poulantzas saw much of the evidence advanced by Miliband as irrelevant to a Marxist view of the state.

The state and the capitalist system

Poulantzas described the state as 'the factor of cohesion of a social formation': in other words, the state was vital for maintaining the stability of the capitalist system. As part of the superstructure, it would automatically tend to serve the interests of the ruling class. It was not necessary for members of the ruling class to occupy elite positions within the state: the existence of a capitalist system was itself sufficient to ensure that the state functioned to benefit the ruling class. Similarly, the background of members of the state elite was of little importance: it was not their class origin but their class position which determined their behaviour. Since they occupied positions in a state, which inevitably functions to benefit the bourgeoisie, their job would ensure they acted in the interests of the bourgeoisie regardless of their background. They would not take actions harmful to capitalist interests.

Relative autonomy

Poulantzas took this argument a stage further. He claimed that:

> *the capitalist state best serves the interests of the capitalist class only when members of this class do not participate directly in the state apparatus, that is to say when the ruling class is not the politically governing class.*
>
> Poulantzas, 1969, p. 73

Poulantzas argued that the ruling class did not directly govern, but rather its interests were served through the medium of the state. As such, the state was relatively autonomous. To some degree it was free from the ruling class's direct influence, independent from its direct control. However, since the state

was shaped by the infrastructure, it was forced to represent the interests of capital.

Poulantzas argued that the relative autonomy of the state was essential if it was to effectively represent capital. The state required a certain amount of freedom and independence in order to serve ruling-class interests. If it were staffed by members of the bourgeoisie, it might lose this freedom of action. The following reasons have been given for the relative autonomy of the capitalist state:

1 As a group the bourgeoisie is not free from internal divisions and conflicts of interest. To represent its common interests the state must have the freedom to act on behalf of the class as a whole.
2 If the bourgeoisie ruled directly, its power might be weakened by internal wrangling and disagreement, and it might fail to present a united front in conflicts with the proletariat. The relative autonomy of the state allows it to rise above sectional interests within the bourgeoisie and to represent that class as a whole. In particular, it provides the state with sufficient flexibility to deal with any threats from the subject class to ruling-class dominance.
3 To this end the state must have the freedom to make concessions to the subject class, which might be opposed by the bourgeoisie. Such concessions serve to defuse radical working-class protest and to contain the demands within the framework of a capitalist economy.
4 Finally, the relative autonomy of the state enables it to promote the myth that it represents society as a whole. The state presents itself as a representative of 'the people', of 'public interest' and 'national unity'. Thus, in its ideological role, the state disguises the fact that essentially it represents ruling-class interests.

Repressive and ideological state apparatus

Poulantzas did not disagree with Miliband about the importance of legitimation. However, he went much further in seeing this process as being directly related to the state. He used a broader definition of the state than Miliband. He divided it into the repressive apparatus – the army, government, police, tribunals and administration – which exercises coercive power, and the ideological apparatus – the church, political parties, the unions, schools, the mass media and the family – which is concerned with the manipulation of values and beliefs, rather than the use of force.

Most writers do not see institutions such as the family as constituting part of the state. Poulantzas argued that they should be categorized in this way for the following reasons:

1 Like the repressive institutions of the state, they are necessary for the survival of capitalism. Without them the proletariat might develop class consciousness and challenge the capitalist system.
2 The ideological apparatus depends ultimately on the repressive apparatus to defend and maintain it. He gave the example of the defence of education through the French police and army intervening against the student revolts in Paris in 1968.
3 Poulantzas argued that changes in the repressive apparatus of the state lead to changes in the ideological apparatus. In fascist Germany, for instance, the state took direct control of much of the ideological apparatus.
4 He claimed that the ultimate communist aim – the 'withering away' of the state – would only be achieved with the abolition of institutions such as the family.

Criticisms of Poulantzas

Miliband (1972) tried to defend himself against the criticisms made by Poulantzas, and he put forward his own criticisms of the latter's work. In particular he accused Poulantzas of structural super-determinism. In other words, Miliband did not believe that ultimately all aspects of the behaviour of the state were determined by the infrastructure. Such a theory, he claimed, could not account for the differences between fascist and 'democratic' states within capitalist systems.

Furthermore, Miliband argued that Poulantzas's theory was not backed up by empirical evidence. It was not sufficient to simply assert that the state must act in the interests of capitalism.

Miliband also questioned the definition of the state proposed by Poulantzas. He expressed great scepticism about the claim that institutions such as the family could be seen as part of the state. He accepted that they might have an ideological role, but denied that they are in any sense directly controlled by the state. Although he agreed that they are part of the political system, he argued that they possess so much independence or autonomy that it is ridiculous to see them as part of the state.

It can also be argued that the theory of relative autonomy is impossible to prove or disprove. If the theory is accepted, any action the state takes can be interpreted one way or another as benefiting the bourgeoisie. If it does not appear to directly benefit them, it can be dismissed as a mere concession to the proletariat. Some neo-Marxists argue that concessions can be more than token gestures. To writers such as Gramsci, the working class do have some power and can influence the actions of the state. (We will analyse neo-Marxist views later in this chapter.)

Evidence to support Marxism

Marxist writers have adopted more sophisticated methods of measuring power than either pluralists or elite theorists. They have examined all three faces of power identified by Steven Lukes (1974), and have also extended the concept to include the effects of decisions.

The effects of decisions

As we saw earlier, the decision-making approach to measuring power used by pluralists has been heavily criticized. Marxists such as Westergaard and Resler (1976) argued that power can only be measured by its results: if scarce and valued resources are concentrated in the hands of a minority, that group largely monopolizes power in society. Westergaard and Resler maintained that 'power is visible only through its consequences; they are the first and final proof of the existence of power.' Put simply, the proof of the pudding is in the eating: whoever reaps the largest rewards at the end of the day holds the largest share of power.

Westergaard and Resler claimed that the marked inequalities that characterize British society 'reflect, while they also demonstrate, the continuing power of capital'. The concentration of wealth and privilege in the hands of the capitalist class therefore provides visible proof of its power. Legislation on taxation, which could lead to the redistribution of wealth, is not usually enforced effectively. Furthermore, loopholes in the law often allow the wealthy to avoid paying much of their tax.

Westergaard and Resler believed that the welfare state does little to redistribute income, for it is largely financed out of the taxes paid by the working class. More recent research conducted by Westergaard (1995) suggests that, if anything, the 1980s and early 1990s saw increased inequality in Britain (see pp. 122–3).

Apart from information on the distribution of wealth and income, Westergaard and Resler used detailed examples to show that the activities of the state represent the interests of the ruling class.

Concessions to the working class

In Britain, as in other advanced capitalist societies, the state has implemented a wide range of reforms which appear to directly benefit either the subject class in particular or society as a whole. These include legislation to improve health and safety in the workplace, social security benefits such as old-age pensions and unemployment and sickness benefit, a national health service, and free education for all.

However, these reforms have left the basic structure of inequality unchanged. They have been largely financed from the wages of those they were intended to benefit and have resulted in little redistribution of wealth. They can be seen as concessions, which serve to defuse working-class protest and prevent it from developing in more radical directions which might threaten the basis of ruling-class dominance. In Westergaard and Resler's words, 'Their effects are to help contain working-class unrest by smoothing off the rougher edges of insecurity.'

Non-decision making

Marxists have also been concerned to examine the second face of power: non-decision making. John Urry, in criticizing Dahl, argued that he:

> *ignores the process by which certain issues come to be defined as decisions and others do not. The study of decisions is the failure to study who has the power to determine what are decisions.*
>
> Urry, in Urry and Wakeford, 1973

Many Marxists believe that the range of issues and alternatives considered by governments in capitalist societies is strictly limited. Only safe decisions are allowed – those which do not in any fundamental way challenge the dominant position of the bourgeoisie. The sanctity of private property is never questioned; the right of workers to keep the profits produced by their labour is never seriously proposed; and communism is never contemplated as a realistic alternative to capitalism.

Ideology

According to Marxists, the ability of the ruling class to suppress such questions is related to the third face of power. Numerous studies claim that the bourgeoisie are able to produce false class consciousness amongst the working class. Westergaard and Resler (1976) argued that ruling-class ideology promotes the view that private property, profit, the mechanisms of a market economy and the inequalities which result are reasonable, legitimate, normal and natural. If this view is accepted, then the dominance of capital is ensured since 'no control could be firmer and more extensive than one which embraced the minds and wills of its subjects so successfully that opposition never reared its head'.

Westergaard and Resler claimed that, because of the pervasiveness of ruling-class ideology, the capitalist class rarely has to consciously and actively exercise its power. Capitalism and the inequalities it produces are largely taken for granted. A capitalist economy guarantees a disproportionate share of wealth to a minority and generates an ideology which prevents serious questioning of the established order. As a result, issues that might threaten the dominance of capital are usually prevented from reaching the point of actual decision. The capitalist class is therefore able to enjoy the advantage and privilege

'merely because of "the way things work", and because those ways are not open to serious challenge'.

If anything, the plausibility of such arguments increased in later decades of the twentieth century. Countries such as Britain and the United States embraced capitalist free markets more wholeheartedly. The regimes of leaders such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher tried to reduce government spending on welfare and state intervention. Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in Britain (1979-91) privatized numerous state-owned industries and tried to introduce competitive, capitalist-like relationships into parts of the welfare state such as the National Health Service (NHS).

However, this does not mean that Marxist views are immune from criticism.

Criticisms of Marxism

Marxists provide a considerable amount of evidence to support their views. However, the Marxist theory of the state cannot explain why the state became stronger rather than 'withering away' in communist countries. Furthermore, Marxists fail to take account of the possibility that there are sources of power other than wealth. Some conflict theorists deny that wealth is the only source of power, despite seeing economic power as important. If they are correct, then Marxists certainly exaggerate the degree to which those with economic power dominate state decisions and determine the effects of those decisions.

We will now consider the state from a neo-Marxist viewpoint.

Neo-Marxist approaches to power and the state

A number of writers have put forward theories of the state and the distribution of power in society which are heavily influenced by Marxism, but which differ in some significant way from the original writings of Marx and Engels. This section examines the work of two such writers: the early twentieth-century sociologist Antonio Gramsci, and the contemporary British sociologist David Coates.

Antonio Gramsci – hegemony and the state

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) is among the most influential twentieth-century theorists who have themselves been influenced by Marx. Gramsci was an Italian sociologist and political activist. A leader of the Italian Communist Party, he is partly remembered for the part he played in the Turin Factory Council Movement, in which industrial workers in that city unsuccessfully attempted to seize control of their workplaces. From 1926 until his death, Gramsci was imprisoned by Mussolini's fascist government, and his main contributions to sociological theory are contained in his *Prison Notebooks* written during that time (Gramsci, 1971).

Gramsci parted company with conventional Marxists in arguing against economic determinism: he did not believe that the economic infrastructure determined to any great degree what occurred in the superstructure of society. He talked of a 'reciprocity between structure and superstructure': although the infrastructure could affect what took place in the superstructure, the reverse was also possible.

Gramsci did not deny that the economic infrastructure of society was important: it provided the general background against which events took place. An economic crisis might increase political awareness amongst the proletariat, for instance. However, he felt that the actions of groups trying to maintain or change society were at least as important.

Political and civil society

Unlike traditional Marxists, Gramsci divided the superstructure of society into two parts: political society and civil society. Political society consisted of what is normally thought of as the state. This was primarily concerned with the use of force by the army, police and legal system to repress troublesome elements within the population. Civil society consisted of those institutions normally thought of as private, particularly the church, trade unions, the mass media and political parties.

In a novel way Gramsci claimed that 'the state = political society + civil society'. He used a very broad definition of the state, for he did not think of it in terms of particular institutions but rather in terms of the activities of a dominant class in society.

Hegemony

At one point in his work Gramsci described the state as:

> *the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to maintain the active consent of those over whom it rules.*
>
> Gramsci, 1971, p. 244

If the ruling class managed to maintain its control by gaining the approval and consent of members of society, then it had achieved what Gramsci called hegemony. Hegemony was largely achieved, not through the use of force, but by persuading the population to accept the political and moral values of the ruling class. Here Gramsci stressed the importance of ideas in society: effective ruling-class control was only maintained to the extent that the ruling class could retain command of the beliefs of the population through civil society.

Gramsci's view on how hegemony could be maintained comes close to Marx's view of false class consciousness. However, unlike the views Marx sometimes expressed, Gramsci did not see the ruling class as ever being able to impose entirely false beliefs and values on the population, nor did he see the state as ever being able to act as a simple instrument or tool of ruling-class dominance. The state could only remain hegemonic if it was prepared to compromise and take account of the demands of exploited classes, and, for the following three important reasons, ruling-class hegemony could never be complete.

Historic blocs

In the first place, Gramsci saw both the ruling and subject classes as being divided. The ruling class was divided into groups such as financiers, small and large industrialists and landowners, while industrial workers and agricultural peasants represented a major division within the subject class. No one group on its own could maintain dominance of society. Hegemony was only possible if there was some sort of alliance between two or more groups.

Gramsci called a successful alliance – which achieved a high level of hegemony – a historic bloc; but because of the different elements it contained it would always be something of a compromise between the groups involved.

Concessions

The second reason why the hegemony of one group would never be complete was that the state always had to make some concessions to the subject class. Gramsci said, 'hegemony undoubtedly presupposes that the interests and tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised are taken into account'. From this point of view, the ruling class had to make concessions in order to be able to rule by consent instead of relying on the use of force. It had to adopt some policies that benefited the subject class.

Dual consciousness

If the ruling class were able to indoctrinate the population completely, then clearly it would not be necessary for them to make concessions. However, Gramsci maintained that this was never possible. He believed that individuals possessed dual consciousness. Some of their ideas derived from the ruling class's control over civil society and its ability to use institutions such as the church and schools to persuade people to accept that capitalism was natural and desirable. However, in part, individuals' beliefs were also the product of their activities and experiences. To a limited extent they would be able to see through the capitalist system, and realize that their interests lay in changing it. For example, their day-to-day experience of poor working conditions and low wages would encourage them to believe that, at the very least, some reforms of the system were necessary.

The overthrow of capitalism

According to Gramsci, then, power derived only in part from economic control; it could also originate from control over people's ideas and beliefs. Since the ruling class was unable to completely control the ideas of the population, it could never completely monopolize power. Similarly the subject class would always have some influence over the activities of the state. The activities of political society would benefit them to the extent that they were able to realize where their interests lay and wrest concessions from the ruling class.

Like Marx, Gramsci looked forward with anticipation to a proletarian revolution, but he saw such a revolution arising in a rather different way. He did not accept that the contradictions of the capitalist economic system made a revolution a foregone conclusion.

The revolutionary seizure of power in Tsarist Russia by the Bolsheviks was only possible because of a complete absence of ruling-class hegemony in that country. The rulers lacked the consent of the subject classes and so those classes were able to overthrow them with a direct frontal attack. Gramsci termed such a violent revolutionary seizure of power a 'war of manoeuvre', in which direct action was taken to secure victory.

In most advanced capitalist countries, though, he saw the ruling class as having much more hegemony than they had possessed in Russia. Consequently countries such as Italy and Britain needed a good deal more preparation before they would have the potential for a proletarian revolution. Gramsci called such preparation a 'war of position' – a kind of political trench warfare in which revolutionary elements in society attempted to win over the hearts and minds of the subject classes. It was only when individuals had been made to realize the extent to which they were being exploited, and had seen through the ideas and beliefs of the ruling class, that a revolution was

possible. For this to happen, 'intellectuals' had to emerge within the subject classes to mould their ideas and form a new historic bloc of the exploited, capable of overcoming ruling-class hegemony.

David Coates – *The Context of British Politics*

Gramsci's views on the state are reflected in a number of later studies, including David Coates's book on British politics (Coates, 1984). Coates does place more emphasis on economic factors than Gramsci, but nevertheless eventually draws conclusions which are similar to Gramsci's. We will discuss his examination of the economic influences on the British state first, before considering those aspects of his work which can be seen as 'Gramscian'.

The state and multinationals

Coates starts his work by attempting to show the limitations on the state which are produced by the international capitalist system. He tries to demonstrate that each capitalist country cannot be analysed separately, since capitalism is not limited by national boundaries.

Multinational corporations with branches in a number of different countries form an increasingly important part of the modern capitalist system. The British government's freedom of action is limited by these companies. The multinationals' decisions about where to invest money and where to open and close factories can have a tremendous impact on the British economy. The largest multinationals, such as General Motors, wield massive economic power: General Motors has a greater turnover than the total wealth produced by the Danish economy.

Attempts to control multinationals are unlikely to be successful. If, for example, a government introduces exchange controls to prevent the companies moving profits abroad, then such controls can be bypassed through transfer pricing. This involves one part of a company selling commodities to a part of the same company in another country at unrealistically high or low prices. Through this technique, multinationals effectively move resources from country to country whatever laws a particular government passes.

In any case, if the government is not to risk jeopardizing the high proportion of investment in Britain which comes from abroad, it cannot afford to pursue policies which would seriously threaten the interests of foreign capitalist companies operating in Britain.

The actions of the British government are further restricted by the major international financial institutions and the World Bank. These organizations are intended to oversee the world's banking, financial and monetary systems. In the 1970s a British Labour government was forced to seek a loan from the IMF (International Monetary Fund), but in order to secure it the government had to comply with the IMF's instructions on how the British economy should be managed. (Global influences on states are discussed again later in the chapter, see pp. 624–33.)

The state and finance capital

Like the elite pluralists Richardson and Jordan (1979), Coates stresses the international influences on the British government. Unlike them, and in common with traditional Marxists, he emphasizes the economic limitations on governments. These constraints come not only from abroad but also from within British society.

Coates claims that finance capital (the banks, insurance companies and financial trusts in the City of London) has a particularly strong influence on the British government. He calculates that in 1981 such institutions controlled assets worth some £562 billion, which represents about £10,000 for every member of the population. He suggests that all governments rely to a considerable extent upon the support of these institutions. If, for example, the latter choose to sell sterling it can rapidly cause a currency crisis as the value of the pound falls.

If the government takes measures which harm the City of London's position as a major financial centre in the world, it risks enormous damage to the British economy as a whole. This is because Britain imports more manufactured goods than it exports, and much of the difference in the balance of payments is made up by invisible earnings, such as the income from the sale of insurance policies worldwide provided by Lloyds of London, and other financial services.

In comparison to financiers, Coates claims, industrial capital (in this case British-owned industry) has less influence over government policy. The CBI, for example, failed to persuade the government to reduce the value of the pound and reduce interest rates in the late 1980s. Both of these measures would have benefited industry. The first would have made British goods cheaper and easier to sell abroad; the second would have cut companies' costs by reducing the price of borrowing money. Both, however, would have made Britain less attractive as a financial centre for foreign investors.

Using such evidence, Coates claims that finance capital has had more influence over the British government than industrial capital, and the consequences have been the decline of British manufacturing industry and rising unemployment.

Divisions in the ruling class

These aspects of Coates's work have much in common with traditional Marxism, although they do place more emphasis on international constraints on

the state. In other respects his work is much closer to that of Gramsci. He explicitly rejects the instrumentalist view of the state put forward by Miliband, and the structuralist relative-autonomy approach advocated by Poulantzas.

In the first case, Coates argues that the state cannot be a simple instrument of the ruling class, since the ruling class itself is divided in such a way that different 'fractions' of capital have different interests. Small and large industrialists, multinational and domestic concerns, finance and industrial capital, all place conflicting demands on the state. Often the state cannot serve one section of the ruling class without damaging another.

Coates rejects the structuralist view because he does not accept that the existence of a capitalist system ensures that ultimately the state will have to act in the interests of the ruling class as a whole. As he puts it, 'what capitalism generates around the state is not a set of unavoidable imperatives so much as a set of conflicting demands'. These conflicting demands stem not just from divisions within the ruling class, but also from divisions between classes.

Dual consciousness

Coates points out that capitalism produces not just an economic system but also a civil society. He follows Gramsci in seeing civil society as consisting of private institutions, such as the family, as well as the social relationships between a whole variety of groups. All of these groups make demands on the government, and they include workers and their unions, ethnic minorities and women, as well as capitalists.

Like Gramsci, Coates sees the exploited and oppressed groups as possessing dual consciousness. To some extent they are taken in by attempts to legitimate the capitalist system, but to some extent they also see through that system. According to Coates, individuals in Britain in exploited classes hold contradictory beliefs. They may accept the basic arrangements of capitalism, such as wage labour, but nevertheless believe that the rich have too much power. They may be racist and sexist, but remain committed to human dignity and equal rights and opportunities for all. Many are loyal to parliamentary democracy, but strongly believe that ordinary people have little influence over government.

In this situation the state has to try to maintain its hegemony despite the existence of some degree of class consciousness among the population.

Hegemony

Coates follows Gramsci in seeing the state as the institution which attempts to cement an alliance or historic bloc of different sections of the population, which is capable of maintaining hegemony. Again, he agrees with Gramsci that this may involve making real concessions to exploited and oppressed groups. Coates argues that the ruling class do not monopolize power entirely. Trade unions, for example, can sometimes exercise a genuine influence on government policy. He sees the nationalizations and improvements made in the welfare state under the 1945 Labour government as representing real working-class gains, and not just token concessions.

According to Coates, most British governments have been able to maintain a high degree of hegemony. They have achieved this by succeeding in getting the population to accept a 'national project'. Most people have been willing to go along with state policies which appear to offer some benefit to all sections of the population. Until the 1980s this was fairly easy in a rapidly expanding world capitalist economy: in the 1950s and 1960s full employment, rising wages and the provision of welfare services such as health and education produced a fairly stable society.

However, Coates is not convinced that ruling-class hegemony will remain easy to maintain in the future. He saw Mrs Thatcher's Conservative Party policies as an attempt to produce a new national project based upon an appeal to improve Britain's economic competitiveness by reducing public spending. Coates believed that the economic weakness of the British economy in the world capitalist system (which was in recession in the late 1980s) produced a crisis for the British state. Its legitimacy was increasingly questioned, and he doubted that Thatcherism would be successful in re-establishing ruling-class hegemony.

Evaluation

Coates's work provides a good example of how neo-Marxist theories of power and the state have become increasingly sophisticated. He identifies a wide range of groups, institutions and processes through which power is exercised and the activities of the state are influenced. The groups involved include members of the working class and trade unions as well as different fractions of capital at home and abroad. He denies that one group monopolizes power, or that all power stems from wealth, but agrees with other Marxist and neo-Marxist theorists that power is very unequally distributed.

Although his work may now be somewhat dated, it can be applied to more contemporary British politics. For example, the power of finance capitalists was never more evident than in 1992 when Britain was forced to leave the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM). The ERM was intended to limit the fluctuations in exchange rates for a number of European currencies to those specified by the member states.

Despite the financial muscle of the members (which included Germany, France and Italy, as well as the UK), currency speculators forced Britain to withdraw when speculation by them in sterling meant that the currency could no longer be sustained within the agreed bands.

Although a Labour government was elected in 1997, it went out of its way, both in opposition and in power, to reassure the financial markets that it would do nothing to undermine their interests. For example, Labour leaders promised to stick to the spending plans outlined by the previous government for three years after taking office, and it also promised not to increase income tax. This would suggest that there is limited scope for left-wing governments to adopt radical policies in contemporary capitalist societies. This issue has been debated by theorists of globalization and others who have discussed the extent to which the nation-state retains the autonomy to act as it chooses (see pp. 624–33).

Abercrombie, Hill and Turner – *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*

Writers such as Gramsci and Coates emphasize the role played by ideas and beliefs as sources of power, in addition to economic factors. However, some Marxists following a more traditional line reject this view. Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (1980) deny that there is a coherent dominant ideology in capitalist societies, and question the view that any such ideology is the main factor holding advanced capitalist societies together. In a rather similar way to Gramsci, they suggest that members of the subject and ruling classes often hold contradictory views. For example, members of the subject class may support the welfare state, but believe in the importance of economic freedom and competition between individuals and companies; similarly they are often strongly nationalistic, but this does not square with the existence of multinational corporations.

Furthermore, Abercrombie *et al.* claim to have evidence that members of the subject class actually reject those elements of a dominant ideology that can be identified. They quote a number of studies to support their point. Paul Willis's study of education, *Learning to Labour* (1977), shows that working-class boys reject much of what schools teach them and attach greater value to manual labour than to more highly-rewarded non-manual jobs. Hugh Beynon's study, *Working for Ford* (1973), revealed that many factory-floor workers are alienated from work and feel exploited.

Such evidence might be taken as support for Gramsci's theory of dual consciousness, but Abercrombie *et al.* see it in a very different light. They argue that it shows the importance of economic power, for if so many people reject ruling-class ideology, then it must be the ruling class's wealth rather than their ideological control that allows them to retain their dominance in society. Abercrombie *et al.* argue that it is factors such as the threat of unemployment, the risk of poverty and the possibility of being imprisoned that make the exploited conform in capitalist societies.

Tom Bottomore – elites and classes

Tom Bottomore (1993) provides an example of a contemporary neo-Marxist approach to power and the state. Bottomore agrees with more conventional Marxists that power is largely concentrated in the hands of an economically dominant upper class. However, he believes that in some circumstances non-economic elites may have considerable power. Furthermore, although he rejects pluralist accounts of power, he does believe that a more equitable distribution of power might be achieved through reformed democratic systems.

Power and the global economy

Bottomore claims that:

> *The world economy is dominated by 500 of the largest multinational corporations, by the nation states in which they have their headquarters, and by those institutions of world capitalism such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund which determine and regulate economic development on a world scale.*
>
> Bottomore, 1993, p. 119

According to Bottomore, the earth's wealth has become more concentrated than ever before and, as a consequence, upper classes and elites have become increasingly dominant. He attributes this increased concentration of power to the following factors:

1 Multinational companies have grown both in size and power. These companies allow small numbers of people – that is, their senior executives – to wield enormous amounts of power.

2 New Right governments and thinking, which became dominant in the 1980s and 1990s, 'lauded the role of a business elite, asserted an extreme individualism, and accepted or even welcomed a gross commercialization of social life and the growth of inequality'. This gave ideological support to the dominance of capitalism and capitalists, and created improved opportunities for the accumulation of profit.

3 Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the USSR collapsed leaving yet more markets for capitalists to exploit. Furthermore, the collapse of the regimes seemed to suggest that there was no alternative to free-market capitalism.

Elite rule and class rule

All of these factors appeared to point to an increasingly powerful ruling class. However, Bottomore argues that power does not always stem from economic control. He is prepared to accept that power has sometimes stemmed partly from the possession of military force (as in the case of military dictatorships), or through the occupation of key party positions (as in the case of communism in the USSR or Nazism in Germany). Nevertheless, both military and political elites in totalitarian regimes base their power to a considerable extent on the control of the economy.

Furthermore, by the 1990s, such sources of power had become relatively unimportant. Bottomore says, 'it is evident that in the present-day world, dominated by the leading capitalist countries, classes and class relations have the most potent influence on the character of political rule'.

Bottomore believes that small groups of people, who dominate the crucial decisions in the contemporary world, act like elites, but should be seen 'more accurately as "upper classes"'. They act like elites because they try to ensure that the political system operates in such a way as to minimize the effectiveness of those who oppose the policies they support.

They do this in a number of ways:

1 Party politics plays down the importance of issues and transforms politics into 'media circuses' in which the personality of party leaders is given undue importance.
2 Summit meetings are held to give the largely illusory impression that the leaders of the largest capitalist countries are serious about dealing with major problems facing the world. In fact, summits are largely media events, and little usually changes as a result of them.
3 Political parties in many countries have increasingly concentrated power in their own hands to the exclusion of the mass of the population.
4 In countries like Britain, the political elites generally oppose electoral reform which would allow the views of minorities to be better represented in Parliament.
5 Political leaders are usually hostile to, and take little notice of, social movements which act outside of mainstream politics.
6 Transnational institutions such as the European Union are remote from the mass of the population and do not have directly-elected officials in the most powerful positions.

Participatory democracy

Although Bottomore sees power as largely stemming from wealth, and he believes that capitalists and the political elites are becoming increasingly powerful, he does not follow some other Marxists in claiming that the only way to improve the situation is a communist revolution. Instead, Bottomore believes that progress can be made by developing a participatory democracy.

Such progress may be possible because capitalism already faces a number of problems:

1 Economic crises and instability are becoming more acute and difficult to control in a global capitalist economy.
2 The world capitalist economy faces serious environmental problems (such as global warming) which will make it more difficult to achieve a continued growth in profitability.
3 Opposition to the logic of global capitalist development is growing, particularly in new social movements such as those engaged in ecological and environmental campaigns (see pp. 643–7).

In this situation Bottomore believes that there is scope for significant improvements which would involve a considerable dispersal of power. He argues for a 'radical devolution of power within nation states themselves, to regional and local authorities whose policies can be more closely observed and influenced by the public'.

Active, participatory democracy can also be enhanced through the activities of social movements. These may operate outside conventional parliamentary and pressure-group politics and can involve more and more people in shaping their own societies. People are increasingly well-educated and have the leisure time to devote to the 'self-regulation of their forms of life'. If participatory democracy is successful, then 'social movements of many different kinds are likely to have a growing influence, encouraging the necessary dissolution of the mystique of political elites and at the same time undermining the real dominance of upper classes'.

Evaluation

Bottomore's work provides an updated neo-Marxist approach to power, which takes account of changes such as the development of social movements and the apparent globalization of the economy. It offers an alternative to communist revolution (which seems increasingly unlikely to happen) as a path towards a society in which power is more equally distributed. However, his work uses a mixture of Marxist class theory and elite theory, and, as a result, it appears confused at times. For example, he does not make the links between political elites and upper-class power (which stems from wealth) particularly clear. His claim that the upper classes are getting ever more powerful seems to contradict his view that power could be decentralized and that new social movements could have a growing role in politics. Furthermore, like the other theories examined so far, Bottomore says little about how the state itself may exercise power. This issue is examined in the next section.

State-centred theories of power

The approaches we have considered so far have been society-centred: they see the state and its actions as shaped by external forces in society as a whole. We will now look at an alternative perspective which has a completely different viewpoint.

Eric A. Nordlinger – the autonomy of democratic states

Society-centred and state-centred approaches

According to Eric A. Nordlinger (1981), theories of power and the state are either society-centred or state-centred. To Nordlinger, all the perspectives on the state and power examined so far are society-centred, and society-centred approaches have 'a pervasive grip upon citizens, journalists and scholars alike'. Pluralism sees the state's actions as determined by the democratic will of the people; elite theory sees its actions as shaped by the wishes of a small group of powerful people; Marxism sees the state as shaped by the interests of a ruling class. Although some Marxist and neo-Marxist theories concede that the state may have some autonomy, they do not go far enough, because, in the final analysis, the state is portrayed as being unable to go against ruling-class interests.

Nordlinger criticizes all these approaches saying:

> *the possibility that the state's preferences have at least as much impact on public policy as do society's is ignored; the state's having certain distinctive interests and divergent preferences is not considered; the state's many autonomous actions are not calculated; the state's numerous autonomy-enhancing capacities and opportunities are not examined.*
>
> Nordlinger, 1981

Nordlinger argues that society-centred approaches have been so dominant that a very distorted and one-sided view of the state and power has been produced. Although society can and does influence the state, the reverse sometimes happens. This is what Nordlinger describes as the state-centred approach to the theory of power. The state acts independently or autonomously to change society.

This is true of democracies, as well as other types of state, even though they are supposed to be under the control of the electorate.

The autonomy of the democratic state takes three forms.

Type 1 state autonomy

Type 1 state autonomy occurs when the state has different wishes to those of major groups in society, and implements its preferred policies despite pressure for it not to do so. For example, state policy in Sweden is often formulated by Royal Commissions. About 80 per cent of those who serve on the Commissions are civil servants, and the recommendations are usually followed even when they are unpopular with the electorate or are opposed by elites outside the state. In Norway, public–private committees which formulate public policy are often chaired by civil servants and, again, their recommendations are normally accepted whatever the opposition to them.

To Nordlinger there are many ways in which the state can enhance its autonomy from society. These include:

1 using secretive systems of decision making;
2 using honours, appointments or government contracts to persuade opponents to accept proposals;
3 using the state's resources to counter resources used by opponents (for example, using the funds in the state bank to prop up a currency that is being undermined by speculators);
4 threatening to change a range of policies in such a way as to harm the interests of opponents of the state's policies;
5 taking actions or issuing statements which cause mistrust among different groups of opponents.

Because the state has considerable power of its own, it is sometimes able to utilize it to prevent effective opposition.

Type 2 state autonomy

Type 2 state autonomy occurs when the state is able to persuade opponents of its policies to change their mind and support the government. Nordlinger argues that this is quite common and examples of it can be found in classical pluralist studies such as Dahl's *Who Governs?* (see p. 596). Although Dahl claimed that the authorities in New Haven were responsive to public opinion and the policies they adopted were shaped by interest groups, Nordlinger believes that the authorities played an active role in manipulating public opinion. For example, Dahl himself pointed out that there had been little or no interest in a programme of urban renewal until the mayor put the issue on the agenda and persuaded various interest

groups to support him. None of the interest groups agreed with his proposals when they were first put forward. From this viewpoint, then, Dahl's own evidence showed that the state could act autonomously in shaping public opinion, rather than having its policies shaped by public opinion.

Type 3 state autonomy

Type 3 state autonomy occurs when the state follows policies which are supported, or at least not opposed, by the public or powerful interest groups in society. Very often, significant groups in society may be unsure of what policies to support and leave it up to the state to decide. For example, between 1948 and 1971 the USA's grain farmers, industrial workers and exporters made little attempt to influence America's international monetary policy. Although the policy affected them a great deal, they were unable to predict the effects of the state's policies and so were content to accept whatever policies the state adopted.

On many issues concerned with the state itself there is considerable apathy on the part of the public, and the state has considerable freedom of manoeuvre, even though the issues may be of great importance. Nordlinger suggests that such issues tend to include 'possible changes in the state units' formal powers relative to one another, policy implementation responsibilities, budgetary allotments, staffing, organization, and standard operating procedures'.

Nordlinger's views suggest that the state has considerable autonomy over many issues, whether there is opposition from society or not. While he recognizes that the autonomy is only partial, he perhaps goes further in attributing independence to the state than other state-centred approaches. His theory is backed up by a limited number of empirical examples.

Other sociologists have conducted more detailed research in their attempts to show that the state acts as an independent source of power.

Theda Skocpol – *Bringing the State Back In*

The autonomy of states from society

Theda Skocpol (1985) is perhaps the most influential of the state-centred theorists. She has written extensively about the state as a source of power and is a strong supporter of what she calls *Bringing the State Back In*. She argues that pluralists, functionalists, Marxists and neo-Marxists have all tended to see the state as shaped by external pressures and have neglected the possibility that the state can shape society. Like Nordlinger, she is critical of such approaches. For example, she says:

> *virtually all neo-Marxist writers on the state have retained deeply embedded society-centred assumptions, not allowing themselves to doubt that, at base, states are inherently shaped by classes or class struggles and function to preserve and expand models of production. Many possible forms of autonomous state action are thus ruled out by definitional fiat.*
>
> Skocpol, 1985, p. 5

To Skocpol, states can have considerable autonomy and, as actors, have the potential capacity to achieve their policy goals. These goals 'are not simply reflective of the demands or interests of social groups, classes or society', for states can have their own goals and pursue their own interests.

Skocpol believes that one of the main aims of states and parts of states is to increase their own power. She suggests that 'We can hypothesize that one (hidden or overt) feature of all autonomous state actions will be the reinforcement of the prerogatives of collectivities of state officials.' 'Policies different from those demanded by societal actors will be produced' as states 'attempt to reinforce the authority, political longevity, and social control of the state organizations.'

Skocpol gives a number of examples of states acting in pursuit of their own interests.

In 1968 in Peru there was a coup organized by career military officers who used state power to plan economic growth, weaken opposition groups in society, and try to impose order. In Britain and Sweden, according to Skocpol, the civil services often oppose the policies of elected politicians and have some success in ensuring that their policies are not implemented in such a way as to undermine the power of the state. In the USA, both the White House and the State Department are fairly insulated from public opinion and democratic control, and they often act autonomously. Skocpol's own research had found that in the USA after the First World War, the Department of Agriculture was a powerful part of the state which acted independently in the pursuit of its own interests.

State capacities

Although all states have the potential to achieve their own goals, their capacity to do so will be affected by a number of factors:

1 Skocpol says that 'sheer sovereign integrity and the stable administrative control of a given territory are preconditions for any state's ability to implement policies'. Unless a state can largely command the territory for which it is responsible, it will have no power base from which to achieve its aims.

2 States that have a reliable and substantial source of income are more powerful than those that do not. For example, if a state relies heavily upon the export of a single commodity or product (as some Third

World states do), then it is vulnerable to a decline in demand for the product or a reduction in its value. On the other hand, economies that export a wide variety of products have a more reliable income.

3 States that govern rich societies obviously have more potential for raising domestic taxes than those that govern poor societies. This can strengthen their power base.

4 States that are forced to borrow large amounts of money can end up in a weaker position than those that have sufficient revenue to finance their activities.

5 States also tend to increase their power if they can recruit many of the most able and highly-educated members of society into their ranks. Not only does this tend to improve the organization of the state, it also deprives non-state organizations and groups of the personnel who would be most likely to challenge and undermine the state's power.

Skocpol believes that whether a state becomes powerful or not partly depends upon how well organized groups in society are. She criticizes Marxists for claiming that states always reflect the interests of a dominant class, saying:

> *the political expression of class interests and conflicts is never automatic or economically determined. It depends on the capacities classes have for achieving consciousness, organization, and representation. Directly or indirectly, the structures and activities of states profoundly condition such class capacities.*
>
> Skocpol, 1985, p. 25

To Skocpol, Marxist political sociology 'must be turned, if not on its head, then certainly on its side'. The state shapes the activity of classes as much as classes shape the activity of the state.

States' capacities are profoundly affected by their relationships with other states. Large and powerful armed forces increase the capacity of a state to defend its own territory or seize the territory of other states. Control over territory is the basis of the state's ability to raise revenue and finance its activities. States can be weakened by wars, especially if they incur crippling costs or they suffer military defeats. External threats can result in internal weakness and sometimes contribute to the state losing its autonomy from society.

States and social revolutions

In her most substantial empirical study, Skocpol (1979) compared revolutions in France (1788), China (1911) and Russia (1917). She argues that in all these cases the activities of the states and the weak position that the states found themselves in played a vital role in causing revolutions. The Chinese, Russian and French states acted in ways which undermined their own power and produced a situation where the state was overthrown by particular classes. Although class conflict was important in all of the revolutions, none of them could be understood without considering the role of the state as an autonomous actor. All three were '*imperial states* – that is, differentiated, centrally coordinated administrative and military hierarchies functioning under the aegis of the absolute monarchies'. Although there were differences in the circumstances that led to the revolutions, Skocpol argues that, in all of them, 'The revolutionary crises developed when old-regime states became unable to meet the challenges of evolving international situations.'

In the following section we will analyse the French revolution in more detail to illustrate Skocpol's argument.

France

France fought two wars in the middle years of the eighteenth century: the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–8) and the Seven Years War (1756–63). Both were expensive and France had little military success – in fact in the Seven Years War it lost a number of colonies to Britain.

In eighteenth-century France around 85 per cent of the population were peasants, but agriculture was not highly developed. France had a lower per capita income than Britain and other European competitors, restricting the wealth available for the state to tax. Furthermore, the tax system was inefficient, with numerous exemptions and deductions for the elites who collected the taxes. Consequently the French state got into financial trouble. This was further exacerbated by French involvement in the American War of Independence, when France sided with the American colonists against their British rulers.

In 1797 an Assembly of Notables was called and the finance minister proposed a new land tax to deal with the problem. The Notables rejected the proposal but advocated the establishment of a new body representing landowners, a body which would have to approve any new taxes. When the king refused there were demonstrations and protests in different parts of the country. The king then summoned the Estates General, which consisted of various elites, but this body was unable to reach any agreement about what to do. While most members of the Estates General wanted to restrict the power of the king, they could not agree on how to do it. Consequently the French state was effectively paralysed and its weakness allowed popular protests to take place. Skocpol says:

> *By the summer of 1789, the result was the 'Municipal Revolution', a nation-wide wave of political revolutions in cities and towns throughout France, including of course the celebrated 'fall of the Bastille in Paris'. In the*

context of simultaneous political crises of 1788–9, crowds of artisans, shopkeepers, journeymen, and labourers roamed the cities searching for arms and grain and demanding both bread and liberty.

Skocpol, 1979, pp. 66–7

The French monarch was overthrown and replaced by revolutionary government.

Conclusion

According to Skocpol, in France, Russia and China, it was the weakness of the state which ultimately caused the revolutions. She comments that 'In all three cases ... the ultimate effect of impediments to state-sponsored reforms was the downfall of monarchical autocracy and the disintegration of the centralized administrative and military organizations of the state.' In each case the state could have acted differently by introducing more effective reforms earlier to prevent the development of a revolutionary situation. Each regime was brought down by a combination of external pressures from other states and the way 'agrarian relations of production and landed dominant classes impinged upon state organizations'. While class relationships were important, none of the revolutions could be understood without reference to the actions taken by the states involved.

In all three countries the revolutions led to the collapse of the old regimes, but they were replaced sooner or later by regimes with even more centralized power and more autonomy than the old states: the Napoleonic regime in France, and communist regimes in China and Russia. According to Skocpol, these were all clear examples of states which could exercise power and which could sometimes act to pursue their own interests rather than the interests of groups within society.

Evaluation of state-centred theories

One of the problems with state-centred theories may be that they are often unclear about their precise theoretical position. Thus Bob Jessop argues:

In their eagerness to criticize society-centred analysis, they have failed to distinguish three different sorts of claim about the state. It is not clear whether they are: (a) rejecting the so-called society-centred approach in its entirety and arguing that the state should be the independent variable; (b) bending the stick in the other direction for polemical purposes, one-sidedly emphasizing the importance of the state as a crucial causal factor; or (c) suggesting that a combination of society and state-centred perspectives will somehow provide a complete account of state–society relations.

Jessop, 1990, p. 287

Most critics are prepared to accept that the actions of the state should be taken into account in studies of power. However, many believe that Skocpol and similar writers exaggerate the importance of the state in an attempt to support their approach. Furthermore, Jessop argues that it is artificial and misleading to see the 'state' and 'society' as being quite separate institutions. He sees state and society as so intimately connected that it is not possible to completely separate them in accounts of power.

Both Jessop and McLennan argue that state-centred approaches offer misleading analyses of the so-called society-centred approaches which they are attacking. Jessop claims that they rest on a '"straw-man" account of the society-centred bias in other studies'. In reality, Jessop suggests, other theories do take account of the power of the state. McLennan (1989) argues in similar fashion that many Marxists, such as Poulantzas, recognize that the state has 'relative autonomy' and that its actions are not entirely determined by society. McLennan concludes that 'Pragmatically it is always degrees of autonomy we are dealing with.'

This is true both of Skocpol's work and of many Marxist theories of power, and the theoretical difference between these approaches has been greatly exaggerated by many of the advocates of a state-centred approach.

Globalization and the power of the nation-state

A number of sociologists and others have begun to argue that the analysis of power cannot be confined to examining the distribution of power within particular nation-states. This is reflected in some of the theories we discussed earlier in this chapter. In his Gramscian discussion of British politics, David Coates (1984) recognizes that the actions of the British state are limited by the operation of the international capitalist system (see pp. 617–19), as does Tom Bottomore in his discussion of elites and upper classes (Bottomore, 1993, pp. 619–20). Similarly, the state-centred theories – such as that of Skocpol, discussed above – acknowledge that state power is affected by the actions of other states.

State-centred theories do, however, tend to emphasize the autonomy of individual states and the significance of their actions. Approaches which claim that globalization has taken place tend to see the

power that exists outside nation-states as restricting their activities and limiting their power. From this point of view, power relationships increasingly cut across national boundaries, and states lose some of their capacity to act independently and shape social life within their boundaries.

There are many advocates and some critics of the theory of globalization. We will start by examining the ideas of one of the strongest supporters of the theory, Kenichi Ohmae, before considering the ideas of those who take a less extreme position.

Kenichi Ohmae – *The Borderless World*

As a management consultant and 'business guru', Kenichi Ohmae (1994) is primarily concerned with the significance of globalization, which he alleges is taking place, for large corporations. However, his analysis also encompasses changes in the distribution of power and the role of nation-states. He is one of the most uncompromising and wholeheartedly enthusiastic advocates of globalization and so his views form a convenient starting point.

The inter-linked economy

According to Ohmae, political borders have become increasingly insignificant in a globalized world, particularly in the most developed economic regions. In particular, Ohmae sees the United States, Japan and Europe as forming one, giant, inter-linked economy (ILE), which is being joined by rapidly developing countries such as Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong. He claims that the ILE 'is becoming so powerful that it has swallowed most consumers and corporations, made traditional national borders almost disappear, and pushed bureaucrats, politicians, and the military towards the status of declining industries'.

Ohmae sees such developments as stemming from an opening up of the world economy so that trade between people in different nation-states becomes very easy. This in turn is a consequence of rapid improvements in communications. Through such developments as cable and satellite TV, cheaper, easier and more frequent international travel, and (since Ohmae was writing) the rapid development of the internet, individuals are increasingly able to see what people consume in other countries. It has also become much easier for individuals to buy what they want from other countries. Ohmae says:

> *Today, of course, people everywhere are more and more able to get the information they want directly from all corners of the world. They can see for themselves what the tastes and preferences are in other countries, the styles of clothing now in fashion, the sports, the lifestyles.*
>
> Ohmae, 1992, p. 19

In the past, governments could exercise considerable control over the flow of information to their citizens. Now this is no longer possible. If people see that what they are getting is substandard they will look abroad for something better or insist upon improvements. For example, in Japan the population grew dissatisfied with the standard of their housing. According to Ohmae, 10 million Japanese travel abroad each year. Seeing how others live led them to insist that the government take steps to improve the standard of the housing available to them.

The lack of control governments now have over information is paralleled by the lack of control they can have over the economy. It is becoming increasingly difficult for governments to protect their domestic industries from foreign competition. It is difficult to enforce attempts to impose tariff barriers designed to prevent imports, and, in any case, it is counterproductive. Tariffs are only effective in some low-income economies. India, for example, protects its domestic car industry from external competition. The end result is over-priced and outdated cars which consumers do not like. In higher-income countries, people demand access to the best goods produced anywhere in the world. According to Ohmae, this is not only good for the consumer, it is good for the country's economy as well.

According to Ohmae, most wealth is no longer produced by manufacturing, and most jobs are created when economies are open to investment from any companies, be they domestic, foreign or multinational. He says, 'such functions as distribution, warehousing, financing, retail marketing, systems integration and services are all legitimate parts of the business system and can create as many, and often more, jobs than simply manufacturing operations'.

Global citizens and regional links

Individuals have become global citizens. They, 'want to buy the best and the cheapest products, no matter where in the world they are produced'. Regional economic links have become more important than national economies, and distant parts of the world are connected through business and other ties. Californian businesses often have stronger links with Asian businesses than with businesses in other areas of the USA. Hong Kong has strong links with parts of Canada, since many business people from Hong Kong moved to Canada because they feared the consequences of Hong Kong reverting to Chinese control. There are clusters of investment by Japanese companies in Alsace-Lorraine and South Wales.

If national governments try to limit or stifle these links, they undermine economic growth and incur the displeasure of their citizens. Nor can governments use economic policies to control their economies in the

way they used to. Financiers can move money around the globe in vast quantities almost instantaneously. Governments cannot set tax rates or interest rates, or try to fix the value of their currency without taking account of these facts.

National policies can soon be rendered ineffective if financiers and corporations move their currency or their businesses elsewhere. Indeed, Ohmae argues that corporations should no longer see themselves as being based in a particular society. To be successful they have to produce the best products in the world. The development costs of being the best are often enormous and only global success will repay the initial investment. To achieve such success they need to have footholds throughout the inter-linked economy and adapt their businesses and products to meet local conditions. This cannot be achieved unless businesses lose their sense of being based primarily in a single country.

Governments and consumers

According to Ohmae, then, governments have largely lost their power to regulate and control both their national economies and information within their boundaries. Another important governmental function, providing military security, is also becoming redundant. In the inter-linked economy it makes little sense for nations to fight over territory. Invading your neighbour would involve destroying property owned by your own citizens, and disrupting economic activity which contributes to your own country's wealth. States such as Singapore have little in the way of armed forces, yet they do not live in fear of external military threats.

In Ohmae's view of the world, power has shifted decisively from governments to individual consumers. Both governments and companies alike have to accommodate the demands of consumers if they are to get re-elected, or win and keep customers. It is a world in which there is a plurality of cultures, in which 'People vary in how they want to live.' Regimes that try to maintain or impose a single, national culture (such as communist regimes) are doomed to failure.

If states have lost much of their economic role and power, and their role in controlling information, and if they are losing their military role, and no longer have a national culture to protect, are they still necessary? Do they still have any power? Ohmae thinks they are necessary and that they retain some limited powers. They are necessary, essentially, to produce the conditions in which consumers, workers and corporations can thrive in the global economy. They are still necessary to provide the infrastructure (such as roads and a legal system) which makes it possible for businesses to operate. Above all, though, they need to try to ensure the best possible education for their citizens. Ultimately, Ohmae believes that economic success results from having a highly-educated, entrepreneurial and well-informed population. To achieve these limited objectives, governments still need to raise taxes. However, if their taxes are too high, the effect will be counterproductive, since businesses will simply relocate elsewhere.

Evaluation

Ohmae's view of a world in which political borders are largely irrelevant and power is transferred to consumers is open to many criticisms. Ohmae ignores the continuing role of nation-states in controlling access to their territories as markets for businesses. Although there has been movement towards freer trade in the world economy, completely free trade has not yet come close to fruition. The three biggest capitalist blocs of Japan, North America and the European Union continue to restrict the trade allowed with each other and with nations outside these blocks.

Ohmae surely exaggerates the decline in the importance of the military capability of states. Neither consumers nor corporations have the ability to use military force to impose their will on others. As Nigel Harris says, 'States have a monopoly within their territory of the use of physical power while companies rarely have more than security guards' (Harris, 1992). Individual consumers have even less ability to impose their will on others through the use of force.

Even if Ohmae is correct in believing that the power of the nation-state has declined, it is surprising that he attributes so much power to consumers. Many other theorists of globalization argue that power has shifted to corporations rather than to consumers (see below). Some theorists, such as Hirst and Thompson, raise serious questions about whether globalization has taken place, while others, such as Giddens, accept that globalization has happened, but make far less extreme claims about the decline of state power. Some of these alternative views will now be considered.

Globalization and transnational corporations

As long ago as 1971, Raymond Vernon published a book claiming that the power of nation-states was being eclipsed by the power of multinational (now often called transnational) corporations. Vernon said, 'Suddenly, it seems, the sovereign states are feeling naked. Concepts such as national sovereignty and national economic strength appear curiously drained of meaning' (Vernon, 1971).

Vernon believed that the power of nation-states was declining, but he saw it as shifting to corpora-

tions rather than consumers. Multinational and transnational corporations are defined in different ways by different writers, but, as a minimum definition, they are business organizations which operate in more than one country. Most of the larger transnational corporations operate in numerous countries and their activities involve vast sums of money. For example, the 1995 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development found that global sales by the foreign affiliates of transnational corporations amounted to $5.2 trillion, which was more than the total value of all goods and services traded in the world (which amounted to $4.8 trillion) (*World Investment Report*, 1995).

In view of the increased popularity of theories of globalization, it is not surprising that some sociologists have argued that power has shifted to such corporations in a globalized world. One such sociologist is Leslie Sklair.

Leslie Sklair – *Sociology of the Global System*

Leslie Sklair (1993, 1995) believes that states retain some power but that any understanding of the global system must focus primarily upon transnational corporations (TNCs).

Transnational practices

Sklair points out that 'The largest TNCs have assets and annual sales far in excess of the Gross National Products of most of the countries in the world' (Sklair, 1993). In 1992 there were 135 TNCs with annual sales of more than $10 billion. He claims that:

> *such well-known companies as Ford, General Motors, Shell, Toyota, Volkswagen, Nestle, Sony, Pepsico, Coca Cola, Kodak, Xerox (and many others most of us have never heard of) have more economic power at their disposal than the majority of the countries of the world.*
>
> Sklair, 1993, p. 7

Sklair's model is based upon the idea of transnational practices. He defines these as 'practices that originate with non-state actors and cross state borders'. These are distinguished from international relations which involve the relations between nation-states. According to Sklair, transnational practices are increasingly important, compared to international relations.

Transnational practices take place in three main spheres:

1 the economic
2 the political
3 the cultural-ideological

These correspond to the practices of:

1 the transnational corporation
2 the transnational capitalist class
3 the culture-ideology of consumerism

Sklair sees the transnational corporation as the vehicle of the global system. He points to the enormous wealth of such corporations and the crucial role they have in most national economies.

The transnational capitalist class is the driver of the global system. This class consists of executives of TNCs, 'globalizing state bureaucrats', 'capitalist-inspired politicians and professionals' and 'consumerist elites (merchants, media)' (Sklair, 1995). It is seen as making system-wide decisions which affect the whole of the global system, and it attempts to make decisions which further its own interests within the system. Although it includes some politicians based in particular nation-states, the class opposes protectionism, which puts national interests above those of the class as a whole.

The culture-ideology of consumerism involves the worldwide spread of the ideology, which stresses the benefits of consumerism. It has become so important because of the near-universal spread of the mass media. Sklair says that cheap televisions, cassettes and radios 'now totally penetrate the First World, almost totally penetrate the urban Second and Third Worlds, and are beginning to penetrate deeply into the countryside in every country' (Sklair, 1995).

TNC power

Like Ohmae, then, Sklair largely sees the decline of the power of the state as a consequence of the development of capitalism. Unlike Ohmae, he believes that power largely rests with TNCs rather than consumers. Sklair claims that:

> *Effective TNC control of global capital and resources is almost complete. There are few important national resources that are entirely exempt from economic transnational practices. Transnational capitalist classes rule directly, through national capitalist political parties or social democratic political parties that cannot fundamentally threaten the global capitalist system, or they exert authority indirectly to a greater or lesser extent as the price levied on the non-capitalist states as a sort of entrance fee into the global capitalist system.*
>
> Sklair, 1995, p. 95

To Sklair, consumers are effectively indoctrinated by the ideology of the corporations. Far from ensuring that a globalized world acts in their interests, they, for the most part, tamely consume the products that capitalist ideology pushes. He

says that 'The control of ideas in the interests of consumerism is almost total.'

Despite his more extreme claims, Sklair does recognize both that there is some opposition to the capitalist global system and that nation-states retain some power. There are some anti-global social movements which challenge the ideology of consumerism, including environmental movements. However, Sklair does not believe that they have the power to mount a serious challenge to global capitalism.

States are less powerless. Sklair admits, for example, that the United States of America remains enormously powerful, certainly compared to some Third World states and even the larger TNCs. He says:

> *All the Fortune 500 corporations [the biggest corporations in the world] do not have the same economic impact on the United States, for example, as a few copper TNCs have had on Chile, or fruit companies on Central America, or mining corporations on Southern Africa.*
>
> Sklair, 1995, p. 99

In a few parts of the world, such as China, TNCs have had little success in gaining power at the expense of the state.

Evaluation

Sklair's analysis is more subtle and better supported by evidence than that of Ohmae. It also recognizes that the global system may have serious disadvantages. It seems more plausible to argue that power has shifted to TNCs than to say, as Ohmae does, that consumers are virtually all-powerful. Nevertheless, Sklair may well exaggerate the power of TNCs. His emphasis is on companies involved in production and he says little about the significance of global financiers, bankers and speculators. Yet finance capitalism involves bigger and more rapid flows of resources than does investment abroad by TNCs.

Other theorists such as Jeffrey Frieden (1991) attribute much more importance to finance capitalism. Furthermore, Sklair concentrates almost exclusively on economic aspects of globalization. A slightly broader view is taken by Kevin Bonnett.

Kevin Bonnett – globalization, power and politics

Globalization

Kevin Bonnett (1994) argues that 'Power in Britain (or in any other advanced country) can no longer be understood as first and foremost existing *within* the society.' Nation-states are a comparatively recent historical creation: Italy and Germany did not become unified states until the late nineteenth century and many colonies did not become autonomous states until they achieved independence a few decades ago.

In some parts of the contemporary world – for example, in the former Yugoslavia – nation-states have broken up and, increasingly throughout the world, power is exercised *across* nation-states rather than *within* them. Bonnett says, 'Many of the economic, political, military and ideological powers that shape our lives work across nations – and increasingly they operate on a global scale.' Multinational corporations, international financial markets, transnational communications systems (such as satellite TV) and transnational organizations (such as the EU) all operate outside of the control of individual nation-states, yet have a profound influence on what goes on within them.

Bonnett acknowledges that international forces – such as colonial empires and international trade – have been significant for centuries, but he believes that, recently, global forces have become more important. He claims that 'What is new is the scale and intensity of ... links and the fact that space and time are "shrunk" by the speed and relative cheapness of travel and electronic communications.'

Globalization and nationalism

While global forces seem to weaken the power of the nation-state from outside, they can also do so from within. Transnational and global relationships may also strengthen 'localism or small scale nationalism'. Ethnic and national groups seeking independence from large states can look to transnational organizations or systems of security to assist them in asserting their independence and claiming nationhood. Thus, 'The Baltic states and other parts of the former USSR have found it possible to proclaim independence – by virtue of links to wider economic and military networks', such as the EU and NATO. In Western Europe, Scottish nationalists have stressed the practicality of becoming independent from England while remaining within the EU. Bonnett says:

> *It has come to seem that almost any* people *with a shared culture or language now comes to define itself as a* nation. *And once they define themselves as a nation, the logical step in the contemporary world is to become a* nation-state *– claiming sovereign independence and national self-determination.*
>
> Bonnett, 1994

From this point of view, the power of nation-states is under threat from two directions.

Internationalism threatens to reduce the power of states to exercise power independently, while small-scale nationalism and localism threaten to undermine the unity of existing states.

Evaluation

By including a discussion of nationalism and localism, Bonnett adds a useful extra dimension to our examination of globalization. However, in one sense, nationalism involves reasserting the importance of nation-states and their governments, albeit in smaller nation-states than exist at present. The revival of nationalism cannot therefore be seen as unambiguously undermining the power of states, since, while attacking the power of existing states, it claims power for new ones (see pp. 263–70 for a discussion of nationalism).

Unlike Sklair, Bonnett makes little attempt to qualify his claims about the globalization of the world and he certainly fails to consider evidence that globalization might not be taking place. The same cannot be said of the next theorists to be considered, who are amongst those who have started to question whether globalization is happening at all.

Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson – questioning globalization

'Inter-national' economies and globalized economies

Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson's *Globalization in Question* (1996) makes an attempt to test the theory of globalization empirically. Like Sklair, they put the role of transnational corporations (TNCs) or multinational corporations (MNCs) at the forefront of their argument. They start their analysis by distinguishing between a globalized economy and an inter-national economy.

They argue that a globalized economy consists of a system in which 'distinct national economies are subsumed and rearticulated into the system by international processes and transactions. The inter-national economic system becomes autonomized and socially disembedded, as markets and production become truly global.' In other words, nation-states become almost irrelevant to patterns of economic activity, and the existence of national boundaries makes little or no difference to patterns of trade.

In an inter-national economy, though, 'processes that are determined at the level of the national economy still dominate and international phenomena are outcomes that emerge from the distinct and differential performance of the national economies'. The world is made up of interacting national economies.

TNCs and MNCs

Hirst and Thompson regard corporations as a key test of whether the world economy is global or inter-national. They distinguish between MNCs (multinational corporations) and TNCs (transnational corporations). In MNCs the national base is important and they are effectively regulated by their home government. In contrast, TNCs are globally based and 'footloose'. They have an international management team and are potentially willing to base their operations, including if necessary their headquarters, anywhere in the world.

Hirst and Thompson then use their own data (based on an analysis of the sales, assets and profits of 500 corporations in 1987, and the sales and assets of more than 5,000 corporations in 1992-3) to test whether corporations are still MNCs or have become TNCs. According to their analysis, both sets of data show that home-based activities dominate in terms of such measures as the number of subsidiaries and affiliates, the location of assets, and the place where profits are produced. For example, in 1992-3, 75 per cent of both German and Japanese manufacturing corporations' sales were in the home region/country. The corresponding figure for the UK was 65 per cent, and for the USA 67 per cent. They conclude that MNCs are dominant in a largely inter-national economy.

Nation-states and power

Hirst and Thompson adopt a more balanced position when discussing economic governance and nation-states. They accept that 'the combined effects of changing economic conditions and past public policies of dismantling exchange controls have made ambitious and internationally divergent strategies of national economic governance far more difficult'. States have to adopt increasingly similar policies if they are to succeed in the contemporary world.

Furthermore, Hirst and Thompson admit that states have a reduced capacity 'to act autonomously on their societies'. They give the example of the socialist government of France in the 1980s. It tried to combat unemployment and recession by pumping money into the economy, but the negative reaction of foreign investors and financiers forced it to abandon the policy.

Along with the loss of economic power, Hirst and Thompson believe that there has also been a loss of military power. This is because it has become inconceivable for most developed nations to pursue policies through military force in a post-cold war but nuclear era. It is simply too risky to embark on military campaigns with the possibility of a nuclear response.

States may even have lost some ideological power. With increasingly heterogeneous populations, states are less able to call on nationalist loyalty. The diversity of populations makes it difficult to produce loyalty to any one set of values.

Although Hirst and Thompson believe that the state's capacities have been reduced and in some ways changed, they do not believe that they have been eliminated altogether. The state retains a role

as a 'facilitator and orchestrator of private economic actors':

> *it still retains one central role that ensures a large measure of territorial control – the regulation of populations. People are less mobile than money, goods or ideas: in a sense they remain 'nationalized', dependent on passports, visas, and residence and labour qualifications.*
>
> Hirst and Thompson, 1996, p. 171

It is this quality which gives the state democratic legitimacy. It can claim to speak for a body of people and thus can play a crucial role in negotiating international agreements. Hirst and Thompson see such agreements as crucial in the contemporary international economy. They conclude that 'Politics is becoming more polycentric, with states as merely one level in a complex system of overlapping and often competing agencies of government.'

Evaluation

Hirst and Thompson can be criticized on a number of grounds. First, their analysis of TNCs and MNCs leaves room for alternative interpretations. They themselves point out that 'The fact that only 30 per cent or so of company activity is conducted abroad does not tell us anything about the strategic importance of that 30 per cent to the overall business activity of firms.' Furthermore, the definition of the 'home region' on which the above figures are based is extremely broad. Thus the German 'home region' is taken to include the rest of Europe and the Middle East and Africa, the US home region includes Canada, and the Japanese home region covers the whole of south-east Asia.

Hirst and Thompson perhaps use an over-restrictive definition of TNCs in order to allow them to arrive at the conclusion that there are few genuine TNCs. Furthermore, as Anthony Woodiwiss (1996) points out, Hirst and Thompson are arguing against a rather extreme view of the 'borderless world' (derived from the writings of Ohmae), which is not representative of the more qualified accounts of globalization.

Second, aspects of their argument seem to point in the opposite direction to the conclusions they reach. Their emphasis on inter-national regulation just adds plausibility to the theory of globalization since increased inter-national regulation is only necessary because of globalization.

Third, Woodiwiss argues that they are so keen to find evidence to support their ideas that they tend to ignore potentially contradictory evidence. In particular, they neglect the transnational influences on economies other than those involving corporations (for example, tourism and changes in exchange rates).

Despite these problems, Hirst and Thompson do succeed in raising serious doubts about the more extreme versions of globalization. They show that home markets remain important to corporations and that most do retain strong attachments to their country of origin. They also show that the continued control over territory and ability to represent populations mean that states continue to have sources of power which are not available to other institutions.

Anthony Giddens – globalization and high modernity

Unlike Hirst and Thompson, Anthony Giddens generally supports the theory of globalization. Indeed, as we will see, he explicitly criticizes Hirst and Thompson. However, Giddens is also critical of the extreme version of the theory advanced by Ohmae, as he steers a path between those who deny globalization has taken place and those who think it has completely transformed the world.

Globalization and time–space distanciation

Anthony Giddens defines globalization as 'the intensification of worldwide social relationships which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa' (Giddens, 1990). This often includes events which take place in other nation-states and which may be outside the control of any state. He sees this process as involving 'time–space distanciation', in which interaction is stretched across space so that people no longer have to be physically present to interact with one another. Technological innovations such as the internet and satellite communications make this possible and reduce the time it takes to communicate with people in other parts of the world. National boundaries become less significant and states less able to control what happens in the world.

Competition and the global economy

Part of this process involves increasing competition between businesses in different societies. Businesses have to compete globally if they are to be successful. They cannot rely upon monopolizing their own domestic market. This is because the opening up of world trade prevents national governments from protecting businesses from foreign competition.

Giddens puts forward some evidence to support his claim that globalization is taking place. He attacks Hirst and Thompson's views by arguing that world trade is more important and more open than ever before. According to Giddens (1999), only 7 per cent of the Gross Domestic Products of the richest nations consisted of exports in 1950. By 1970 it was 12 per cent, and by 1997 it had risen further to 17 per cent. Furthermore, Giddens also points out that a much-expanded role has developed for world

financial markets. According to Giddens, 'Over a trillion dollars a day is turned over in currency exchange transactions.' Furthermore, institutional investors who can shift money around the world extremely rapidly have become incredibly powerful. According to his figures, in the USA in 1996 they held assets of $11.1 trillion. Even if Hirst and Thompson are right to point out that much trade is regional, Giddens is convinced that 'there is a "fully global economy" on the level of financial markets'.

Nation-states and power

Where do these economic changes leave the governments of nation-states? Giddens believes that the changes do restrict their power. Nation-states have to compete to attract inward investment from major transnational corporations and they have to keep institutional investors happy. They cannot therefore afford to levy very high taxes in order to pay for expensive welfare programmes. If they tried to tax too highly, businesses would go elsewhere and deprive the government of the business revenue they need to fund their welfare programmes. Giddens says:

> *The new period of globalization attacks not only the economic basis of the welfare state but the commitment of its citizenry to the equation of wealth with national wealth. The state is less able to provide effective central control of economic life.*
>
> Giddens, 1994, p. 140

However, this does not lead Giddens to agree with writers such as Ohmae that the nation-state has lost its power and become insignificant. Giddens asks, 'Is the nation-state becoming a fiction as Ohmae suggests, and government obsolete? They are not, but their shape is being altered' (Giddens, 1999). It is true that governments lose some economic power, but other powers are retained, even enhanced.

Giddens believes that governments can sometimes use nationalist sentiments to increase the support they gain from their populations. Furthermore, he believes that 'Nations retain, and will for the foreseeable future, considerable governmental, economic and cultural power, over their citizens and in the external arena.' However, he believes that to exercise such powers they increasingly need to collaborate with other states, with transnational actors, and with regions and localities within their own states. Each of these has become more important, and national governments, without being stripped of power, do increasingly share it with other groups and organizations.

Evaluation

Giddens provides perhaps the most balanced analysis of globalization. Although parts of his argument are not particularly well backed up with evidence, he does show an awareness of the continuing power of states and of some of the limitations that have been put on that power.

David Held – democracy and the cosmopolitan order

David Held (1993) is a British sociologist who has given detailed consideration to the implications of globalization for the state. His work adds an extra dimension to the views already considered, because it includes a discussion of how democratic systems can try to come to terms with the limitations on them stemming from globalization. He talks of the 'progressive enmeshment today of states and societies in regional and global networks', and considers how democracy can be developed in a world in which the nation-state does not have all the power.

Examples of globalization

Generally Held makes stronger claims than Giddens does about the impact of globalization.

He argues that, in terms of economics, governments find it hard to control their own economy. For instance, countries cannot determine their own interest rates without reference to those in other countries. If a government wants to cut interest rates to stimulate its economy, it may be unable to do so if other countries keep their rates high, thus attracting investment to them. World financial markets can undermine the value of a country's currency, forcing its government to change policy to take account of the new circumstances. Furthermore, multinational companies are using marketing and production systems that are global in scale. The same products are sold throughout the world and production can be moved from one country to another regardless of the wishes of national governments.

Ecological issues cut across national boundaries as well. The destruction of rain forests, air pollution and nuclear disasters can all lead to environmental damage in other parts of the world. With more people travelling, health issues such as AIDS become difficult to address in one country without taking account of the situation in others.

Like other writers on globalization, Held also points to the increased power of international and transnational organizations. He notes that the 'European Community, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or the International Monetary Fund diminish the range of decisions open to given national "majorities"'. Military issues also take on a global dimension, with the existence of spy satellites for gathering intelligence, and intercontinental missiles. With the ending of the cold war, as a result

of the collapse of communism in Russia and Eastern Europe, there are closer contacts and more complex interconnections between groups of nations which were formerly hostile to one another.

Held points out that some countries are in a particularly weak position when trying to maintain their independence and autonomy. Many Third World countries are heavily in debt to the First World and they rely upon them for aid and military protection. They are left 'vulnerable and dependent on economic forces and relations over which they have little, if any, control'.

Overall, then, nations have become less and less isolated and at the same time less able to control their own affairs. This has serious implications for democracy.

Globalization and cosmopolitan democracy

Democracy is based upon the assumption that a group of people can exercise control over their own affairs. As it becomes more difficult to confine issues within national boundaries, it becomes harder to operate democracy along these lines. As well as bringing people together, globalism can create 'fragmentation' and 'disintegrative trends'. Closer global ties bring diverse cultures together and can increase the chances of conflict and war between people of different cultures and national identities. As the old power blocs of the cold war become less dominant, people assert their local and regional, ethnic or nationalist identities, threatening democracy. Globalization can 'weaken old political and economic structures without necessarily leading to the establishment of new systems of regulation'.

Held argues that these problems can only be tackled by producing a new democratic system which enables people in different nations and localities to decide together how they are going to tackle issues which cut across national boundaries.

In fact, since the Second World War it has been recognized that some form of international law and global institutions might be necessary to create order in the world and deal with international issues. In the post-war period the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were introduced to try to regulate aspects of the world's monetary and economic systems, and the United Nations was established. Although the UN has tried to intervene in issues throughout the world, Held argues:

> *The image of international regulation projected by the charter (and related documents) was one of 'states still jealously "sovereign"', but linked together in a 'myriad of relations'; under pressure to resolve disagreements by peaceful means and according to legal criteria.*
>
> Held, 1993, pp. 33–4

Because of the emphasis on sovereignty of states, though, the UN has not been able to act effectively in most of the situations it has tried to deal with. Members of the Security Council have been able to veto any policy they disapproved of and, with China, the USA, Russia, the UK and France all as permanent members, there has rarely been agreement. Nevertheless, the UN has, according to Held, been useful. It has:

> *provided a vision, in spite of its limitations, of a new world order based upon the meeting of governments and, under appropriate circumstances, of a supranational presence in world affairs championing human rights.*
>
> Held, 1993, p. 36

Despite its having had some success, Held does not believe that the UN, or a similar body, can produce democracy in the new, globalized world. Instead, he proposes a cosmopolitan model of democracy in which people can participate in decisions taken at different levels. Some decisions would be taken by new regional parliaments representing areas such as Africa and Latin America. The existing European Parliament could be strengthened. Some transnational issues could be resolved by referendums held in those areas of the world affected by particular issues.

Individuals would be protected in the cosmopolitan model of democracy by the 'entrenchment of a cluster of rights, including civil, political, economic and social rights, in order to provide shape and limits to democratic decision-making'. These rights would be incorporated into the constitutions of nation-states and international bodies. Such rights would be upheld by international courts which would have strong powers to punish governments which refused to conform to them. Ultimately the world would need 'an authoritative assembly of all democratic states and societies – a re-formed UN, or a complement to it – would be an objective'.

Conclusion and evaluation

Held admits that his proposals have many possible pitfalls. People might wish to ask questions about a new democratic international assembly – questions such as 'Would it have any teeth to implement decisions? How would democratic international law be enforced?' and 'Would there be a centralized police and military force?' However, Held believes that most concerns could be 'met and countered' and that the establishment of the sort of international body he proposes is not beyond the bounds of possibility.

Held's views are perhaps somewhat idealistic. While many states are affected by global issues, that does not necessarily mean that they have the same interests in relation to those issues. For example,

poor Third World countries have an interest in changing some aspects of the global economy which benefit the rich First World, and which the latter therefore wants to retain. The disagreements among member states of the EU and the inability of the UN to take effective action in places such as Bosnia, Kosova and Chechnya suggest that Held's vision of international democracy and cooperation will not easily become reality. Nevertheless, he may be right to point out that democracy must tackle the problem of globalization if power is not to become more distant from the citizens of nation-states. Identifying the problem is easier than finding the solution, but it could at least be seen as a step in the right direction.

Michael Mann – the sources of social power

In recent work, Michael Mann (1986, 1993) has started an ambitious project which aims to develop new theories of power and of sociological theory in general. However, far from simply entering current debates about power and sociological theory in an abstract way, he has tied his theory of social life to an account of the development of societies from 10,000 BC to the present day. In doing so, he has returned to the all-embracing questions about societal development which so concerned the 'classical' sociologists, Marx, Weber and Durkheim. Furthermore, Mann has a considerable advantage over these eminent sociologists, since he has access to up-to-date historical and archaeological evidence which was unavailable to them.

Mann's work incorporates elements from the theories of power discussed in the two preceding sections of this chapter:

1 He agrees with writers such as Skocpol that the state can be an independent source of power, arguing that 'political power' is as important as ideological, military and economic power.
2 He follows theories of globalization in claiming that theories of power cannot be confined to examining how power is distributed within national boundaries. Like Held and others, Mann believes that networks of power can stretch across countries and across the globe. He does not, however, see this as a particularly new phenomenon, claiming that networks of power have long extended across sizeable geographical areas.

In some ways Mann's work represents a more fundamental challenge to theories of power than state-centred approaches and the theory of globalization, for Mann starts his analysis by attacking perhaps the most basic concept of sociology, that of 'society'.

The non-existence of 'society'

Mann says 'if I could, I would abolish the concept of "society" altogether'. Although he continues to use the word 'society' for the sake of convenience, he is anxious to point out that 'societies are not unitary. They are not social systems (closed or open); they are not totalities.' Mann claims that it logically follows from this standpoint that non-existent societies cannot be divided into parts or sub-systems, as they are by Parsons, nor can they be analysed in terms of 'levels', as in the Marxist division between the infrastructure and the superstructure. Furthermore, he rejects the idea of societal evolution because of his belief that societies are not unitary.

How, then, is Mann able to justify his rejection of so many central concepts in sociological theory? His main argument is very simple: human behaviour is not, and has never been, exclusively related to, or caused by, a particular territory in which an individual lives. In the modern world, for example, the development of the mass media has led to many aspects of culture extending across national boundaries. Nor is the spread of cultural influences particularly new: for centuries, major religions such as Islam and Christianity have had an influence which transcends national boundaries.

Like theorists of globalization, Mann claims that a society such as Britain is not a political unit which can be analysed independently. Britain is a member of the military alliance NATO, and of the economic grouping of nations, the EU. Many companies in Britain are owned by multinational corporations which are based abroad. Through trade, the British economy is affected by other countries, and cultural products from all parts of the world are imported. In order to understand the culture, politics, military activity and economics of Britain, then, it is necessary to consider what happens in other parts of the world. Throughout history, according to Mann, trade, war and conquest have ensured that there has never been an isolated society.

Power networks and types of power

On the basis of such observations, Mann reaches the view that 'societies are constituted of multiple overlapping and intersecting sociospatial networks of power'. In order to understand social life, sociologists need to study the way that humans enter into social relationships which involve the exercise of power.

Since power is so central to his theory, Mann spends some time explaining what he means by the

word and distinguishing different forms of power. He sees power as the ability to pursue and attain goals through mastery of the environment. Power, in this sense, can take two separate forms:

1 Distributional power is power over others. It is the ability of individuals to get others to help them pursue their own goals. Distributional power is held by individuals.
2 In contrast, collective power is exercised by social groups. Collective power may be exercised by one social group over another: for example, when one nation is colonized by another. It may also be exercised through mastery over things: for example, the ability to control part of nature through an irrigation scheme.

Having distinguished between different types of power, Mann goes on to explain the two main ways in which it can be exercised:

1 Extensive power is 'the ability to organise large numbers of people over far-flung territories in order to engage in minimally stable cooperation'. An example of extensive power would therefore be the influence over believers exercised by a major religion.
2 Intensive power, on the other hand, is the ability 'to organise tightly and command a high level of mobilization or commitment from the participants'. Thus a religious sect might be seen as having intensive power in comparison to the more extensive power of a church.

In the final part of Mann's analysis of different types of power, he identifies a difference between authoritative and diffused power:

1 Authoritative power is exercised when conscious, deliberate commands are issued, and those to whom they are issued make a conscious decision to follow them. A football player following a referee's instructions to leave the field would be an example of authoritative power.
2 Diffused power spreads in a more spontaneous way. It involves power relationships, but ones which operate without commands being issued. Mann uses the example of market mechanisms: a company can go out of business not because someone commands that it does, but because it is unable to compete with other companies producing the same types of product. Often this type of power produces behaviour that appears as 'natural' or 'moral', or as resulting from 'self-evident common interests'.

By combining the distinctions between intensive and extensive, and authoritative and diffused power, Mann is able to distinguish four principal types of power. Examples of the four types of power are given in Table 9.4.

Table 9.4 Michael Mann – examples of social power

	Authoritative	Diffused
Intensive	Army command structure	A general strike
Extensive	Militaristic empire	Market exchange

Source: M. Mann (1986) *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 9.

The sources of power

So far, this account of Mann's theory has explained the types of power that he believes exist, but not where that power comes from. Central to his approach is the simple idea that power can have four sources: these can be economic, ideological, political and military.

Mann follows Marx in thinking that economic power is important, but he does not attribute the primary role to it that Marx does, because of the importance of the three other sources. Ideological power involves power over ideas and beliefs; political power concerns the activities of states; and military power the use of physical coercion. In Marxist theory these sources of power are often seen as being united. From a Marxist point of view, the group that has economic power – those who own the means of production – will also have ideological power through their ability to promote false class consciousness. Furthermore, the economically ruling class will exercise control over the state and will therefore have political power; and, through the state, it will also monopolize military power.

However, Mann disagrees with the Marxist view, claiming that each source of power can be independent of the others. Ideological power can be wielded by churches or other religious organizations, which may have little or no economic power. The political power of a state does not ensure that it will have ideological power. In communist Poland, for example, much of the population appeared to attach more importance to the ideas of the Roman Catholic Church and the free trade union Solidarity than to those of the communist state. Even political and military power are not necessarily tied together. In feudal Europe, military power rested mainly in the hands of individual lords and not with the state. In modern societies, in a *coup d'état* the army actually takes power from the political rulers. Thus, in Chile, General Pinochet led a military coup in which power was seized from President Allende's elected government.

Of course, Mann accepts that in a particular society at a particular time, two or more of the four sources of power might be monopolized by a social group, but all power never rests in one set of hands. Since no society is completely independent, networks of power will stretch across national boundaries, thus

preventing a single group within a society from having all the power.

An example of Mann's approach

In his explanation of social changes Mann explains how these various sources of power are related to each other. For example, he demonstrates how, shortly after AD 1300, an innovation in military strategy led to a number of important social changes in Europe, and in particular a weakening in the influence of feudalism.

At the battle of Courtrai, Flemish infantrymen were faced by an attack from French mounted knights. At the time, semi-independent groups of armoured mounted knights were militarily dominant and the normal tactic for infantry who were attacked by them was to flee. On this occasion, though, the Flemings were penned against a river and had no alternative but to fight. By adopting a close-knit formation, the pike phalanx of the Flemings was able to unseat many of the knights and secure victory.

As a result, feudal mounted armies lost their dominance, and societies such as the Duchy of Burgundy, which did not adapt to the changed circumstances, declined. Furthermore, the change led to a centralization of state power and a reduction in the autonomy of feudal lords. It became recognized that mixed armies of cavalry, infantry and artillery were the answer to the pike phalanx, and states could more easily provide the resources to maintain this type of army than could individual lords. Thus changes in the nature of military power led to an extension of the political power of the state.

On the surface, it might appear that this significant episode in history is an example of military technology determining the course of social change, but Mann believes that ideological and military factors were also important. He suggests that pike phalanxes could not have succeeded unless the individuals in them were convinced that those on either side of them would stand firm. In societies such as Flanders and Switzerland, such trust was likely to develop because of the way of life of the burghers and free peasants there. Furthermore, the different types of army produced by the Flemings and the Swiss on one side, and feudal societies on the other, were related to their respective abilities to produce an economic surplus to finance their armies. Thus the four sources of social power were all linked: an extension of military power was related to the nature and distribution of ideological and economic power and led to an increase in the political power of the state. In this example, military power was particularly important, but, according to Mann, in other episodes in history, any of the other three sources of power can assume a more central role.

Conclusion

Other theories of power and the state tend to emphasize a particular source of power. Marxism stresses the importance of economic power, pluralism stresses ideological power in democracies, and elite and state-centred theories emphasize political power. Mann's approach argues that any complete theory must embrace all of these, as well as including military power.

Michel Foucault – power/knowledge

The nature of power

The work of Michel Foucault (1926-1984) provides an influential and novel view of power. Like Mann, he saw power as something that is not concentrated in one place or in the hands of particular individuals. However, he goes much further from conventional views of power than Mann does. Foucault's complex (and sometimes obscure and contradictory) writings suggest that power is found in all social relationships and is not just exercised by the state. Nevertheless, much of his work is concerned with the way in which the state develops its ability to classify and exercise power over populations.

To Foucault, power is intimately linked with knowledge: power/knowledge produce one another. The extension of the power of the state therefore involves the development of new types of knowledge which enable it to collect more information about and exercise more control over their populations. This involves the development of discourses: ways of talking about things which have consequences for power. However, Foucault does not just think of power in coercive terms: as well as restricting people, power can enable them to do things. Furthermore, and paradoxically, he only sees power as operating when people have some freedom. Power never allows total control and, indeed, constantly produces resistances and evasions as people try and often succeed in slipping from its grasp.

Foucault's ideas will now be examined in more detail.

Madness and Civilisation

Much of Foucault's early work was taken up with an account of how the state increasingly tried to regulate and control populations. Before the eighteenth century, governments made little attempt to control, regulate or even monitor the behaviour of the mass of the population. Few statistics were produced, and few records kept.

In *Madness and Civilisation* (1967) Foucault describes how such phenomena as unemployment, poverty and madness started to be seen as social problems by states in the eighteenth century. Before that, the mad were largely free from state interference. Although they were sometimes cast out of towns, they were permitted to wander as they wished in rural areas. Alternatively they were put to sea together in 'ships of fools'. However, this system of dealing with the mad was replaced by places of confinement (such as madhouses) in which the mad, the poor and the sick were separated and isolated from the rest of the population.

Foucault argues that this was due to a new concern in European culture with a sense of responsibility for such social problems and a new work ethic. It was felt that something should be done with the mad; and others were punished for the new sin of laziness.

By the start of the nineteenth century, however, the policy of confining these diverse groups together came to be seen as a mistake. For example, although the unemployed were forced to work in the madhouses, this just led to them doing some of the work needed in the local area, thus increasing unemployment and making the problem worse. Consequently, new methods were used to separate the different groups of undesirables.

New scientific disciplines, such as psychiatry, were developed to categorize people (as sane or mad, and as suffering from different illnesses). In this process the discourses of the social sciences came to be involved in power relationships. According to Madan Sarup, by discourse Foucault meant 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Sarup, 1988).

From this viewpoint, the practices of psychiatry (and, connected to them, the knowledge contained in theories) created the mentally ill. Psychiatry was a discourse and a tactic used to control particular groups in the population. The technique of classifying people as mentally ill was an important part of the state's gradual development of systems of administration. Administration allowed the monitoring of people and hence offered the potential for controlling their behaviour.

However, classifying and monitoring people did not just involve a straightforward coercive use of power by the state. Rather it created the possibility of localized power/knowledge relationships that took place at an individual level. For example, power/knowledge related to the discourse of psychiatry created the possibility of power being exercised in individual interactions between psychiatrists and their patients. In Foucault's view, though, the power is part of the discourse of psychiatry, and not something which is held by individual psychiatrists.

Discipline and Punish

Many of the themes first explored in *Madness and Civilisation* were explored further in a later book, *Discipline and Punish* (1991, first published 1975). In this book, Foucault traces the changes in the nature and purposes of punishment in the eighteenth century. His book starts with a graphic account of the execution of the French murderer Damiens in Paris in 1757. Damiens was first placed on a scaffold where pieces of flesh were torn from him using red-hot pincers. Lead, oil, resin wax and sulphur were melted together and then poured on to the flesh wound. Each of his four limbs was then attached to a separate horse so that they could pull him apart. However, initially this failed, and a knife had to be used on Damiens to make it easier for the horses to pull his body apart. Still alive, his head and the trunk of his body were tied to a stake and set on fire.

By the late eighteenth century such public punishments were starting to die out. Punishment was increasingly hidden. People were executed behind closed doors using swifter methods (such as the guillotine or hanging), and many people were locked away in prisons. Here they were subjected to a regime involving a strict timetable of work, sleep, education and so on.

Changes in punishment

Foucault argues that these changes involved a fundamental shift in the nature of punishment. In the early eighteenth century, punishment focused on the body, it involved the direct infliction of pain as a way of making the offender suffer for his crimes, and as a way of discouraging others. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, this had changed. It was no longer the body that was the main focus of punishment, but the soul. The punishment consisted of a loss of rights – particularly the right to liberty – rather than the suffering of pain. The certainty of being caught was intended to deter people, rather than the public humiliation of execution or being placed in the stocks.

Furthermore, the intention was to reform the offender rather than simply to make him suffer.

Foucault admits that there was not a clearcut break between these two systems of punishment (executions continued to be used, for example), but he argues that, nevertheless, there was a definite shift from one approach to another.

What was being judged also subtly changed. In the earlier period people were judged for what they had done. By the later period they were judged for what sort of a person they were. The motivation behind the crime began to be taken into account because of what it revealed about the offender. The punishment used varied according to the motivation. Foucault says:

> *The question is no longer simply: 'Has the act been established and is it punishable?' But also: 'What is this act, what is this act of violence or this murder? To what level or to what field of reality does it belong? Is it a phantasy, a psychotic reaction, a delusional episode, a perverse action?' It is no longer simply: 'Who committed it?' But: 'How can we assign the causal process that produced it? Where did it originate in the author himself? Instinct, unconscious, environment heredity?'*
>
> Foucault, 1991, p. 19

A whole range of experts were involved in answering these questions: experts such as psychologists and psychiatrists, educationalists, and members of the prison service. Control over punishment became fragmented and wrapped up in their specialist knowledge. Foucault says, 'A corpus of knowledge, techniques, "scientific" discourses is formed and becomes entangled with the practice of the power to punish.'

In such extracts, Foucault, then, tries to show that, even as the state developed techniques for controlling populations, it also ceded power to the experts who had the knowledge deemed necessary to exercise power in ways suitable for reforming people.

The exercise of power/knowledge

However, Foucault does not argue that such knowledge/power relationships are entirely '"negative" mechanisms that make it possible to repress, to exclude, to prevent, to eliminate'. Instead, he believes that there are also 'positive' aspects to them. They can be positive in the sense that they make it possible for certain things to be achieved. Foucault gives the example of how punishments can be used to motivate workers to step up their efforts and provide more of the labour power that society might need.

Foucault is also insistent that power is not something simply possessed by individuals. He says, 'power is exercised rather than possessed'. An individual does not simply hold power; they can use power if they can muster the right 'dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques' to achieve what they want. Furthermore, power is only exercised by getting people to do something, when they have a choice not to. It is not simply physical coercion, where there are no options open to those over whom power is exercised. In fact (in a later work) Foucault makes it clear that he thinks there are very few circumstances in which people have no choice. In most circumstances somebody would have a choice of resisting by the possibility 'of committing suicide, of jumping out through the window, of killing the other' (Foucault, 1988, quoted in Hindess, 1996).

From Foucault's point of view, then, it is always possible to resist the exercise of power, to refuse to go along with what others are trying to get you to do. When attempts are made to exercise power, the result always has an element of uncertainty. Indeed, he believes that power can sometimes be reversed. At one point in his work he argues that the fact 'that I am older and that at first you were intimidated can, in the course of the conversation, turn about and it is I who can become intimidated before someone, precisely because he is younger' (Foucault, 1988, quoted in Hindess, 1996).

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault reiterates his belief that power/knowledge are virtually inseparable. He says:

> *we should admit that power produces knowledge ... that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.*
>
> Foucault, 1991, p. 27

Partly because power is so wrapped up with knowledge, there is almost always some chance to resist the exercise of power by challenging the knowledge on which it is based. For example, a psychiatric patient could question the accuracy of a psychiatrist's diagnosis.

Because power/knowledge imply one another, power relationships are present in all aspects of society. They 'go right down into the depths of society ... they are not localised in the relations between the state and its citizens or on the frontier between classes' (Foucault, 1991).

Thus Foucault would see most of the views of power discussed in this chapter as inadequate because they are too limited in scope. Marxism is too limited because it only focuses on class relationships of power. Pluralism and elite theory are inadequate because they concentrate on power exercised by the state. None of them look at power in the everyday

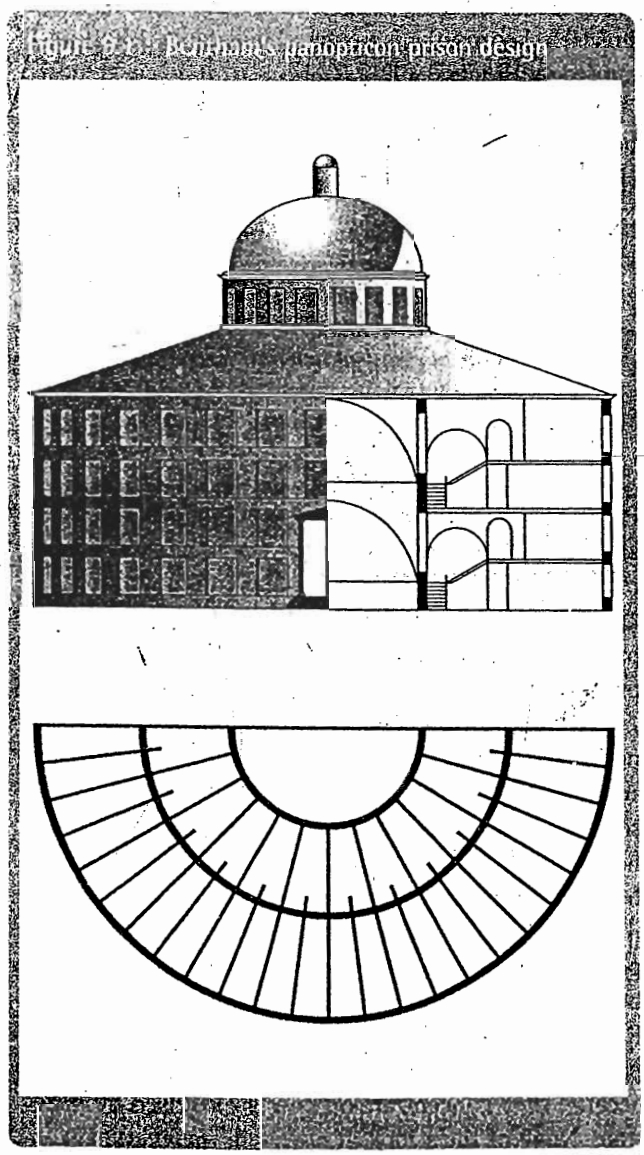
activities of people and the commonly-used discourses involved in interaction.

Government and discipline

Although Foucault does not believe that power/knowledge is only exercised through the state, that does not mean that he thinks that power/knowledge is absent from the state. Attempts are made by states and other authorities to govern, manipulate and control behaviour. Although never entirely successful, sophisticated techniques can be devised to do this.

In *Discipline and Punish*, for example, Foucault goes into considerable detail about the way in which activities overseen by the state involve power/knowledge. For example, he discusses the panopticon, a prison design proposed by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham. Although never fully implemented, aspects of it were incorporated into the design of some prisons, as illustrated in Figure 9.1. The key feature of the panopticon was a central tower which allowed prison warders to see into every cell and therefore to observe the activities of all the inmates. The use of backlighting would mean that the warders would be able to see into cells without the inmates knowing whether they were being observed at any particular time. Inmates would therefore have to restrain their activities and act in a disciplined manner all the time, just in case they were being watched.

Figure 9.1: Bentham's panopticon prison design



Foucault sees discipline as an important feature of modern societies. Techniques of surveillance are used to check on people's behaviour in places such as schools, hospitals and elsewhere. However, the possibility of being watched also encourages self-discipline: people become accustomed to regulating and controlling their own actions, whether or not somebody is checking up on them.

Discipline gives people the ability to regulate and control their own behaviour. According to Foucault, it is based upon the idea that humans have a soul that can be manipulated. This is far more effective than trying to punish individual bodies by inflicting extreme pain, in the way described earlier in the execution of Damiens. Instead of punishing bodies, you try to produce docile bodies – bodies which pose no threat to order because they are self-disciplined.

Discipline is an important part of governing, but it is not confined to the activities of the government. It is also present in the activities of organizations (from nineteenth-century factories to contemporary corporations). Furthermore, it is never entirely successful. As Barry Hindess describes it, 'The suggestion is, then, that we live in a world of disciplinary projects, and all of which suffer from more or less successful attempts at resistance and evasion. The result is a disciplinary, but hardly disciplined society' (Hindess, 1996).

In Foucault's view, government extends far beyond the activities of the state and, particularly, the passing and enforcement of laws. Attempts at government through discipline are almost ubiquitous features of modern societies, but such attempts are never completed and never entirely successful. The unruly pupil, the worker who sabotages machinery, and the psychiatric patient who denies their diagnosis are as much a feature of modern society as the disciplined citizen with a docile body.

Evaluation

Foucault's work provides a number of important insights into the nature of power. For example, he succeeded in showing that knowledge is closely connected to power, he demonstrates that power can be found in many social relationships other than

those involving the state, and he makes the important observation that power is unlikely to be absolute. He is aware that people often resist or evade attempts to exercise power.

In many ways, then, his work is subtler than that of other writers, such as some Marxists (who tend to see power as concentrated in the hands of an economic ruling class), elite theorists (who see it as concentrated in the hands of those in key positions), and pluralists (who focus on the decisions of the state to the exclusion of other ways of exercising power).

However, it can be argued that Foucault underestimates the importance of the sources of power discussed in some of these theories. For example, he neglects the power than can be exercised through the control of economic resources, such as the power to shut down a plant by shifting production elsewhere. He neglects the power that can be exercised through the use of military force. On a smaller scale, he might exaggerate the power of a mental patient to resist or evade their diagnosis; and, of course, the power of prisoners is usually strictly limited and does not include the power to change their sentence. Foucault tends to focus too much on the power associated with knowledge rather than other types and sources of power.

Foucault's work on power is in some ways contradictory. On the one hand, it documents the increased ability of governments and others to watch, record, manipulate or even control the activities of populations. On the other hand, it insists that power is only exercised when people have some freedom, and it claims that resistance is always possible. Thus his work seems to point in opposite directions. It also involves a strange definition of power which directly contradicts more conventional definitions. In most views of power (such as Weber's, discussed on pp. 588–9), power is exercised precisely when people do not have freedom to act as they choose rather than when they do.

Despite these problems, Foucault certainly succeeded in developing ideas that have proved to be provocative and have stimulated both research and theorizing. He has also provided an interesting analysis of how modern societies develop techniques of social control.

Postmodernism, politics and new social movements

There are a variety of postmodern approaches to politics. Most, like Foucault, see politics as involving a wider range of activities than those confined to the state and political parties. They all tend to identify a difference between modern politics and postmodern politics. They vary in the sort of changes they associate with postmodern politics and the significance they attach to those changes.

We will start by examining some of the more extravagant claims made by postmodernists, and then discuss postmodern theories that make more modest claims about changes in the nature of power and politics. The most extreme view of all is perhaps that of Jean Baudrillard. He goes way beyond Foucault's claim that power is dispersed, arguing that power has disappeared and politics is no longer real.

Jean Baudrillard – the end of politics

Perhaps the most extreme postmodern view of power and politics is advanced by Jean Baudrillard (1983). Baudrillard's basic position is that signs (such as words and visual images) no longer reflect or represent reality. Instead, signs have become totally detached from reality and indeed disguise the fact that reality no longer exists. In this process, politics becomes simply about the manipulation and exchange of signs to produce the appearance of a non-existent reality. We have entered an era of simulacra: signs which mask the fact that reality no longer exists.

Examples of the end of politics

Baudrillard gives a number of examples of this process:

1 Party politics in Western democracies gives the impression of offering a real choice between different parties with differing policies. In reality this is an illusion. The differences between parties (such as the Republicans and Democrats in the USA) are minuscule, and the same homogeneous political elite occupy state positions whoever wins the election. Having elections maintains the impression that political conflict continues to exist.
2 To Baudrillard, wars have also lost their reality: they have become simulacra. That is not to say that they do not have real effects. Baudrillard concedes that 'the flesh suffers just the same, and the dead ex-combatants count as much there as in other wars'. However, wars do not exist in the sense that they involve 'the adversity of adversaries, the reality of antagonistic causes, the ideological seriousness of war – also the reality of defeat or victory'.

Baudrillard gives the example of the bombing of Hanoi by the USA during the Vietnam war. He thinks that this bombing had no military purpose, since America had already decided to withdraw its forces, but it did allow the Vietnamese to pretend to be reaching a compromise and the Americans to feel less bad about leaving. The bombing was a simulacrum because it hid the reality that nothing was at stake – the bombing could make no difference to the outcome.

3 Baudrillard seems to believe that contemporary politicians have no real power. He describes Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Ford and Reagan as puppet presidents who lacked the power to change the world. Their main purpose was to maintain the illusion that politics continued as normal. To Baudrillard they were simply the 'mannequins of power'.

4 Baudrillard believes that even the most potentially devastating political conflict, the cold war, hid the absence of power. In the cold war the possession of vast arsenals of nuclear weapons by the main (supposed) protagonists (the USA and the USSR) was irrelevant. The destructiveness of the weapons cancelled each other out and made any actual war impossible. The situation therefore '*excludes the real atomic clash* – excludes it beforehand like the eventuality of the real in the system of signs'.

Baudrillard therefore believes that real power and actual politics have disappeared into a system of signs which is based around simulacra – signs which have no relationship to an actual reality. He talks of 'the impossibility of a determinant position of power', and describes 'power itself eventually breaking apart ... and becoming a simulation of power'.

Evaluation

Baudrillard's claims are so extravagant that they are hard to justify. He provides no definition of power, so it is difficult to evaluate his claim that it has disappeared. Nevertheless, Baudrillard admits that people are killed in real wars, and he does not justify his claim that there are no real victors and vanquished in wars. For example, the USA did lose the Vietnam war, and a regime to which it was hostile did take control of the government. By any reasonable definition of power and politics, this was a political defeat for the USA and a victory for their Vietnamese enemies, since the Vietnamese regime did gain power against the wishes of the US government.

There are many similar examples which seem to contradict Baudrillard's arguments.

Baudrillard may have more of a point in arguing that it often makes little difference which political party wins elections in countries such as the USA. However, he still fails to show that there are no significant differences between the policies of different parties. Baudrillard tends to make sweeping generalizations backed up by examples whose significance is debatable. He does not systematically examine the evidence which might support or refute his case. For this reason, his claims, while interesting, are open to serious doubt. Even other postmodernists do not go as far as arguing that power has disappeared and that politics is just an illusion. They do, however, claim to have identified some important changes in power and politics in a postmodern era. (For further evaluation of Baudrillard, see Chapter 15.)

Jean-François Lyotard – the decline of metanarratives

Politics and language-games

As discussed elsewhere (see Chapter 15 for a detailed account), Jean-François Lyotard associates postmodernism with a decline of metanarratives. By this he means that people no longer place their faith in big, all-embracing stories about how the world works or about society. In politics they lose their belief in political ideologies such as Marxism and fascism. However, it is not just particular sets of political beliefs that lose people's support; rather, people become sceptical that any set of beliefs can provide an effective understanding and resolution of the problems of humanity. People no longer think that a perfect society is attainable.

The implication of this view is that politics will become less about arguments over major ideologies and will become more localized and limited in scope. Lyotard sees knowledge in general as the main source of power in postmodern societies. As people lose their faith that any one metanarrative can provide comprehensive knowledge, knowledge breaks down into a series of different, specialist language-games. Politics therefore becomes increasingly linked to specialist language-games and less concentrated in the hands of states.

Furthermore, knowledge itself becomes evaluated more according to whether it is useful, rather than whether it is true. That is, if knowledge can be used to achieve certain specific aims, then it is accepted, whether or not it can be shown to be true in terms of scientific theories. Lyotard says that knowledge 'will continue to be, a major, perhaps the major – stake in the competition for power' (Lyotard, 1984).

Useful knowledge is not confined to states, and is increasingly possessed by multinational corporations and by other organizations and individuals that are part of civil society. Lyotard is aware that power can be exercised through coercion (which could be exercised, for example, by state-controlled military forces), but he sees such power as becoming much less important than that exercised by those who possess the most useful knowledge.

Evaluation

Lyotard's work opens up a number of ideas on power and politics, which have been developed and reiterated by later postmodernists. These include the equation of power with knowledge; the possibility that the state loses much of its power; the idea that politics becomes fragmented; and the idea that people become concerned with single issues rather than grand ideologies.

While there may be some truth in all of these ideas, they are also open to criticism. For example, this sort of approach tends to ignore military power; it may underestimate the power of nation-states (see pp. 621–4); and it ignores the continuing importance of some 'metanarratives'. For example, nationalist metanarratives remain a powerful force in areas such as Serbia; and religious metanarratives remain powerful in Islamic Iran.

Some critics have argued that most Western societies are dominated by the idea of free-market capitalism, which is no less of a metanarrative than the ideology of communism. Such examples suggest that centralized state power and big issues remain important in contemporary politics. (For further evaluation of Lyotard, see Chapter 15.)

Nancy Fraser – postmodern politics and the public sphere

The public sphere

Nancy Fraser argues that there has been a shift from predominantly modern to predominantly postmodern politics in contemporary societies. She argues that such a shift involves a change in the public sphere. She defines the public sphere as those aspects of social life other than the economy and the activities of the state. She describes it as 'the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs' and as 'a site where social meanings are generated, circulated, contested and reconstructed' (Fraser, 1995). Fraser believes that the public sphere has undergone important changes which involve a transition in the nature of politics.

The public sphere in modern societies

According to Fraser, in modern societies three main assumptions were made about the public sphere:

1 It was assumed that democratic debate was possible between people even if they had different statuses. Thus a poor person with a low-status job had as much chance to participate in debate in the public sphere as someone who was rich, successful and in a high-status job.

2 It was thought preferable to try to integrate everyone into one arena in which the concerns, the preferences and the beliefs of the public were discussed. It was thought undesirable for groups to discuss issues separately from one another. It was believed that 'a single, comprehensive public sphere is always preferable to a nexus of multiple publics'.

3 In the modern conception of the public sphere it was believed that people should discuss what was in the public interest, what was good for everyone, rather than arguing for their own private interests and what was good for them.

Fraser questions all of these modern assumptions about the public sphere:

1 In practice, inequalities between members of the public restricted the chances disadvantaged groups had to make their voices heard and their opinions count. What Fraser calls 'protocols of style and decorum' – ways of talking and acting – served to mark out higher-status individuals from lower-status ones. Lacking the appropriate protocols, women and those from ethnic minorities and lower classes found it difficult to get their views listened to and respected.

2 In a situation where substantial inequalities exist, Fraser denies that it is desirable to have public debate confined to a single, overarching public sphere. She believes it is far better to have multiple public spheres in which members of different social groups or those with specialist interests discuss issues with one another. In these groups people can develop alternative competing views to those of the political mainstream, and then compete to get their views on to the political agenda. Fraser says:

> *members of subordinated social groups – women, workers, people of color, and gays and lesbians – have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics. I have called these "subaltern counterpublics" in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated groups invent and circulate counter discourses.*
>
> Fraser, 1995, p. 291

Eventually groups such as feminists may succeed in getting their ideas taken seriously and effecting some changes in society.

3 Fraser also rejects the idea that people should not push their private interests in the public sphere. She argues that what starts out as being a private interest can come to be accepted as an issue of public concern. For example, when feminists started raising the issue of sexual harassment their ideas were not taken seriously. Most people considered the behaviour they complained of to be no more than 'innocent flirting'; others saw it as a purely personal matter.

Fraser argues that the personal and the private can be political, and you cannot presume in advance

that certain things should be off limits for public debate. Furthermore, labelling issues like sexual harassment as private simply serves to perpetuate and reinforce the power of privileged groups – in this case, men. The divide between the public and the private is an artificial division of modern societies and it should not be allowed to shape public, political debate. People themselves should be the only arbitrators of what should be discussed in the public sphere and it should not be limited by any conception of what is in the public interest.

Postmodernism and the public sphere

Fraser therefore believes that modern assumptions about the public sphere need to be replaced by postmodern ones. These should involve:

1 The elimination of the inequalities between social groups which prevent people from having equal power in public, political debate.
2 The acceptance and encouragement of different groups having their own debates.
3 The rejection of the idea that supposedly 'private' issues should be off limits for public debate.

Fraser therefore advocates a pluralistic politics in which the widest possible participation takes place. She sees politics as operating outside the formal mechanisms of party politics and parliamentary government, and sees it as involving a wide variety of groups talking, discussing and arguing. She sees issues such as gender, ethnicity and sexuality as very important in postmodern politics. Class also remains important, but it is no longer the dominant issue it once was. To Fraser, inequalities stemming from class, race, gender and sexuality cut across each other and influence debates in the public sphere. The interplay of different types of inequality is characteristic of postmodern politics. She illustrates these points with reference to the discussion of the issue of Clarence Thomas in US politics (this case is also referred to in Chapter 4, see p. 271).

Clarence Thomas and postmodern politics

Clarence Thomas is a US judge who was nominated in 1991 to be appointed to the Supreme Court of the USA. Clarence Thomas is black and has generally conservative views. His nomination was generally supported by right-wing politicians. However, after being nominated, a black woman, Anita Hill, accused him of sexually harassing her some years earlier when she was working with him in a junior position.

The argument over whether Thomas should be confirmed in his appointment was played out in the public sphere, even though it involved behaviour – sexual harassment – which some saw as a private issue. It involved issues of race, gender and class differences. The struggle over the appointment involved trying to present the case as a particular sort of issue (a class, gender or race issue). It showed the importance of language in postmodern politics because the argument rested upon the words used to define the issue.

The Senate Judiciary Committee, which reviewed the proposed appointment, initially decided not to publicize the accusations made by Hill. However, pressure from feminist groups, who accused the committee of sexism, brought the issues into the open for public debate. The feminists succeeded, therefore, in getting the question of sexual harassment accepted as being of legitimate public concern. However, the White House, who proposed Thomas in the first place, managed to argue that other aspects of Judge Thomas's private life (including a claim that he had admitted watching pornographic movies when he was a law student) were not relevant to public debate.

Anita Hill was not so successful in ruling her private life out of bounds for public scrutiny. Fraser says, 'Soon the country was awash in speculation concerning the character, motives, and psychology of Anita Hill.' She was accused by different people of being 'a lesbian, a heterosexual erotomaniac, a delusional schizophrenic, a fantasist, a vengeful spurned woman, a perjurer, and a malleable tool of liberal interest groups'.

Anita Hill had some success in presenting herself as a woman who was the victim of discrimination and inappropriate behaviour by a man. Although they were both black, Judge Thomas had more success in using the issue of race to defend himself. Fraser describes how he claimed that the hearings were 'a "high-tech lynching" designed to stop "an uppity Black who deigned to think for himself". He spoke about his vulnerability to charges that played into racial stereotypes of black men as having large penises and unusual sexual prowess.' In doing so, he tried (largely successfully) to make Anita Hill appear to be behaving like a white racist. Fraser says, 'the result was it became difficult to see Anita Hill as a black woman'. The position of black *women* became marginalized. Thomas succeeded in claiming some of the protections of privacy that had historically been given to white men. Hill was not able to get the same protections. This was not, perhaps, too surprising given that, historically, 'black women have been highly vulnerable to sexual harassment at the hands of masters, overseers, bosses and supervisors'.

Class issues were also involved in the case. As Hill's superior when he was alleged to have harassed her, it could be argued that Thomas was trying to exploit his superior class position to obtain sexual favours. However, supporters of Thomas in the media portrayed the issue quite differently. They depicted Anita Hill as

a professional, intellectual yuppie, while Judge Thomas was depicted as an ordinary bloke with down-to-earth and commonsense views. This depiction ignored the fact that Hill was born into rural poverty.

In the end, Thomas was confirmed as a Supreme Court judge.

Conclusion

Fraser claims that this whole episode neatly illustrates the nature of postmodern politics. It shows how arguments over how issues are defined are crucial. It shows how arguments over what should be allowed into the public sphere and what should be kept private are of key importance. It demonstrates how inequalities between a range of social groups continue to shape postmodern politics in debates in the public sphere. It shows how debates in the public sphere influence the activities of the state. Finally it shows how, in the public sphere, a wide variety of different voices can be heard.

The Thomas/Hill case led to:

> *the fracturing of the myth of homogenous 'communities'. The 'black community', for example, is now fractured into black feminists versus black conservatives versus black liberals versus various other strands of opinion that are less easy to fix with ideological labels. The same thing holds true for the 'women's community'. This struggle showed that women don't necessarily side with women just because they are women.*
>
> Fraser, 1995, p. 307

Postmodern politics is more complicated than modern politics ever was.

Evaluation

Fraser makes some useful observations about contemporary politics. Certainly she seems on strong ground in arguing that issues relating to what should be private and what can be public are important, and in claiming that gender, ethnicity and sexuality are important political issues as well as class. However, she may exaggerate the difference between modern and postmodern politics.

Although they might have been less prominent in the past, issues such as gender and ethnicity have not been absent from politics in previous eras. (Examples include arguments over the introduction of voting rights for women and campaigns to abolish slavery.) Furthermore, there has always been a plurality of groups (such as pressure groups) trying to get their particular issues to the top of the political agenda. If there has been a move towards the sort of postmodern politics described by Fraser, then it may be a matter of degree rather than a clearcut break with a very different system of modern politics.

New social movements and the new politics

Postmodern theories of power and politics, such as that of Fraser, stress the fragmentation and widening of political debate, and relate it to a decline in the importance of conventional party politics. These themes can all be linked to the emergence and development of what have come to be known as new social movements, which are seen by some sociologists as a key aspect of changes in the nature of politics in contemporary capitalist societies. The main characteristics of new social movements will be outlined first, before discussing a range of views on the significance of these movements.

Simon Hallsworth – 'Understanding new social movements'

Simon Hallsworth provides a useful introduction to the main characteristics of new social movements.

Defining new social movements

According to Hallsworth, the term 'new social movements' is generally applied to 'movements such as feminism, environmentalism, the anti-racist, anti-nuclear and civil rights movements which emerged in liberal democratic societies in the 1960s and 1970s' (Hallsworth, 1994). They are movements which are 'held to pose new challenges to the established, ... cultural, economic and political orders of advanced ... capitalist societies'. The term is not usually applied to movements supporting traditional values (such as the anti-abortion movement), to long-established social movements (such as trade unions), or to conventional political parties. It is sometimes used broadly to incorporate religious movements like the Moonies, the Human Potential Movement and some ostensibly non-political groups such as New Age travellers.

New social movements and issues

New social movements tend to have an issue basis. They are focused on particular social issues. These broadly divide into two types of issues:

1 The first type are concerned with issues to do with 'the defence of a natural and social environment perceived to be under threat'. In this category are

animal rights groups (such as the Animal Liberation Front), anti-nuclear groups (such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) and environmental groups (such as Greenpeace, and Friends of the Earth). They tend to be opposed to 'a perceived tendency inherent in the logic of the modern industrial order to plunder and annihilate the natural world'. The more radical ones believe that their campaigns can show the way towards a quite different sort of society, in which people live in more harmonious ways with animals, the natural environment and each other. Others have more modest aims, such as encouraging recycling to limit damage to the environment.

2 The second type have a 'commitment to furthering the provision of rights to historically marginalised constituencies in societies such as women, ethnic minority groups and gay people'. Feminist, anti-racist and gay rights groups (such as OutRage!) come into this category, as do groups campaigning for the rights of the disabled.

The novel features of new social movements

New social movements represent a departure from conventional party and pressure-group politics in a number of ways:

1 Such groups have tried to extend the definition of what is considered political to include areas such as individual prejudice, housework and domestic violence.

2 They have generally rejected the development of bureaucratic organizations in favour of more informal structures. Hallsworth says, 'they are usually characterised by low levels of bureaucracy, decision-making premised upon the idea of full participation, the appointment of few (if any) full-time officials, and a blurring of the social distance between officials and other members'. They are not content to delegate to, or be represented by, elites. Instead they seek a participatory democracy.

3 New social movements tend to be diverse and fragmented, with many organizations and informal groups concerned with the same issues. There is no central leadership to coordinate the activities of the different groups. Feminism provides a good example of this (see pp. 136–9 for a discussion of different types of feminism).

4 Unlike political parties, they do not seek power for themselves. Unlike traditional pressure groups (like unions and employers' organizations), they do not use threats to withdraw resources (such as labour power or capital) to achieve their objectives. Instead they use a wide range of tactics, from illegal direct action (sometimes including bombs) to civil disobedience. They also use a variety of means, such as publishing books and appearing on television, to win people over to their causes.

5 New social movements tend to pursue very different values to conventional politicians. Generally, economic issues related to improving people's material living standards are not given much prominence. They are mainly concerned with what Hallsworth and others call 'post materialist values'. These are more to do with the quality of life than with material comfort. They are the product of societies in which it is assumed that people's basic material needs (such as food and shelter) can be easily met.

6 According to Hallsworth, members of new social movements tend to have certain social characteristics which distinguish them from members of more conventional political organizations. Most members tend to be young (particularly between 16 and 30). They also tend to be from neither traditional working-class nor upper-class backgrounds. Instead they are mainly from a new middle class, 'who tend either to work principally in the public/service sector of the economy (such as teachers, social workers, nurses etc.) or who are born to parents who work in the public sector'. Those who are outside conventional employment, particularly students and the unemployed, are also over-represented in these movements.

Conclusion

Hallsworth concludes that new social movements:

> *may be conceived as the heralds of distinctly new forms of politics in western liberal democratic societies. Considered in this way their uniqueness is apparent in the novelty of the issues they have sought to contest; in the post-material values they have sought to advocate; in their distinctive organisational form and structure; in the form of political activity with which they are associated; as well as by the distinctive profile of their membership.*
>
> Hallsworth, 1994, p. 10

However, different sociologists have disputed both how significant these movements are and what their significance is. Some of these disagreements will now be examined.

Stephen Crook, John Pakulski and Malcolm Waters – social movements and postmodernization

Crook, Pakulski and Waters associate the development of social movements with a process they define as postmodernization. This involves a clear shift from the politics of modern societies to a new politics of postmodernizing societies. Although postmodernization is an ongoing process and may not yet be complete, they do believe that 'New politics marks both a substantive and permanent change in the political complexion of advanced societies' (Crook, Pakulski and Waters, 1992).

Old politics in modern societies

According to these writers, politics in modern societies had a number of key features:

1 It was dominated by political parties drawing their support from particular classes.
2 Politics was largely concerned with the sectional interests of these classes.
3 Politics was dominated by the activities of elites who were supposed to represent the interests of particular socio-economic groups.
4 The state was the key focus of political activity and the exercise of power. In Europe the bureaucratic-corporatist state was developed. Corporatism involved allowing the representatives of the two sides of industry (capital and labour, or employers and workers) access to state decision-making through their organizations. In Britain, for example, these were principally the CBI (Confederation of British Industry) and the TUC (Trades Union Congress). Negotiations between these groups were used to reach compromise solutions and blunt the impact of class conflict.
5 In the old politics, political activity was seen as belonging to a separate, specialized sphere of social life, which was not the concern of ordinary people in their everyday activities.

New politics in postmodernizing societies

However, according to Crook *et al.*, old politics of this sort has largely given way to a new politics which is very different.

New politics has the following characteristics:

1 The class basis of support for political parties declines. Left-wing parties can no longer rely upon working-class support, and right-wing parties can no longer rely on members of the middle and upper classes voting for them. The electorate becomes more volatile and identifies less with a particular class.
2 Politics becomes less concerned with sectional interests and more concerned with moral issues that affect everyone. For example, a concern with animal rights, world peace or ecology is not confined to particular classes but is based upon a universal appeal to moral principles. Furthermore, people's political views become associated with their choice of lifestyle rather than with class membership. Thus ecological movements will be supported by those who choose to live green lifestyles (for example, by recycling their products or cycling rather than using cars) rather than by people from any particular class.
3 The new politics moves away from people relying upon elites to represent them. In the new politics, social movements encourage everyone to become involved in campaigns over certain issues. The members of new social movements are often suspicious of leaders and want to retain democratic control over their own organizations.
4 The new politics is not focused on the activities of the state, nor is it based upon the incorporation of sectional interest groups into state decision making. Unions and employers' organizations lose some of their influence on government, and the focus of politics moves from the state to civil society.
5 This change is so great that the new politics 'spills over and fuses with the socio-cultural arena ... protests combine with leisure activities and merge into a total counter-cultural *Gestalt*'. Political views do not just reflect your lifestyle; choosing to live in a particular way is a political statement and a form of political activity.

Postmodernization and the shift to new politics

What then has caused the shift to the new politics?

Perhaps the most important factor is what Crook *et al.* call class decomposition. Members of social classes become less similar to one another. There is progressive social differentiation: that is, even people from the same backgrounds become increasingly dissimilar to one another. Members of the bourgeoisie become divided between owners and managers, the working class becomes divided according to the region they live in, their level of skill, and 'a growing diversity of lifestyles and consumption patterns'. The middle class also becomes increasingly heterogeneous, with divisions between professional, administrative and technical workers and between state employees and those working in private industry.

New social movements do tend to attract particular groups in the population, such as the young, the geographically mobile, the well-educated and those in creative and welfare professions. However, according to Crook *et al.*, this represents 'socio-cultural rather than socio-economic' divisions. It is related to lifestyle and consumption patterns rather than class divisions. (For more details of Pakulski's views on class, see pp. 119–22.)

Another important cause of the shift to the new politics is the increasing importance of the mass media in postmodernizing societies. As the media come to penetrate all areas of social life, politics becomes increasingly about the manipulation of words and symbols in the mass media. In this situation, political issues are:

> *always contextualized, and linked with the global issues and general values, often in the form of such doom scenarios as nuclear holocaust and greenhouse disaster. This dramatizes them, adds a sense of urgency, and generates mass anxiety which proves to be an exceptionally potent propellant for action.*
>
> Crook, Pakulski and Waters, 1992, p. 156

The media therefore contribute to people taking a more global outlook, which makes it less likely that

they will confine their political concerns to narrow sectional interests.

Conclusion

Crook *et al.* conclude that postmodernization has led to a permanent shift in politics, resulting in 'the increased diversity of political processes – more open organizational structures, more diverse elites, more fluid and fragmented alliances and loyalties, and more complex networks of communication'. They go on to argue that 'Even if the inevitable normalization strips the new politics of some of its formal idiosyncrasies, the diversity that constitutes a major departure from the class-structured partisan politics of the past will persist.'

Evaluation

Crook *et al.* identify some significant trends in contemporary politics, but they may exaggerate them. Some writers argue that there has been little if any decomposition of classes (see pp. 122–3). Others have questioned the view that the class basis of voting has significantly declined (see pp. 659–62). Trade unions and employers may still have an important role in contemporary politics and, from a Marxist point of view, writers such as Crook *et al.* ignore the continuing powerful influence of the capitalist economy on politics (see pp. 609–19). Perhaps a more balanced view of new social movements and new politics is taken by the next writer to be considered, Anthony Giddens.

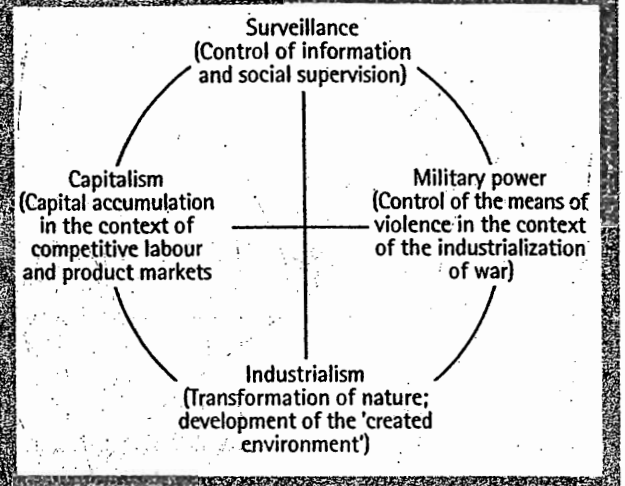
Anthony Giddens – social movements and high modernity

Like Crook *et al.*, Anthony Giddens (1990) believes that important changes have been taking place in politics in contemporary societies. Unlike Crook *et al.*, Giddens believes that these changes are part of developments in modernity rather than part of a transition to postmodernity. As modernity has developed, and moved into a phase which he calls high modernity or radicalized modernity, changes have taken place; these have been changes in emphasis rather than complete transformations.

Giddens characterizes modernity as having four institutional dimensions, illustrated in Figure 9.2:

1 Capitalism is 'a system of commodity production centred upon the relation between private ownership of capital and propertyless wage labour'. The analysis of capitalism has been the focus of much of the sociology developed by Marxists.
2 Industrialism is 'the use of inanimate sources of material power in the production of material goods, coupled to the central role of machinery in the production process'.

Figure 9.2 The institutional dimensions of modernity

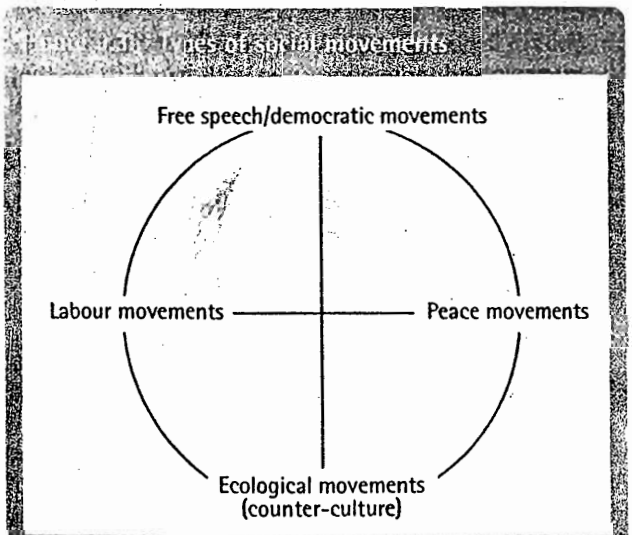


Source: A. Giddens (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, p. 59

3 Surveillance 'refers to the supervision of the activities of subject populations in the political sphere'. Following Foucault (see pp. 635–9), this may take place in workplaces, prisons, schools and similar institutions. It is largely the concern of nation-states and, with the advent of modern societies, the ability of states to monitor their populations greatly increases.
4 Military power concerns 'control of the means of violence'. This again is largely the prerogative of the nation-state, and the development of military technology leads to the industrialization of war and increases the ability of the nation-state to use violence.

According to Giddens, social movements develop which correspond to these four institutional dimensions. These are illustrated in Figure 9.3.

Figure 9.3 Types of social movements



Source: A. Giddens (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, p. 159

Social movements concerned with each of the four dimensions have existed throughout the modern period. However, in high, or radicalized, modernity the emphasis in political activity shifts away from labour movements, which were most prominent in the early period of modernity:

1 Labour movements correspond to the institution of capitalism. They are specifically concerned with 'attempts to achieve defensive control of the workplace through unionism and to influence or seize state power through socialist political organisation'.
2 Free speech/democratic movements correspond to the institutional dimension of surveillance. Like labour movements, they have a long history within modernity. In earlier periods they were often closely linked to labour movements. At the same time as trying to gain economic improvements for their members, they often also tried to win them greater rights to democratic participation. In recent times, free speech/democratic movements have tended to become separated from labour movements and have campaigned in their own right. A British example is Charter 88, which campaigns for, amongst other things, the introduction of a Bill of Rights for British citizens.

The other two types of movement – ecological and peace movements – Giddens describes as 'newer in the sense that they have come to increasing prominence in relatively recent years'. However, he does not believe that they are completely new; both have a history dating back to much earlier in the modern period.

3 Peace movements are concerned with the means of violence. Pacifist movements go back to earlier wars, such as the First World War, when the industrialization of war meant that war was becoming increasingly destructive. However, peace movements have become more prominent because of the 'growth in high-consequence risks associated with the outbreak of war, with nuclear weaponry forming the core component in contemporary times'.
4 Ecological movements correspond to the institutional realm of industrialism. The 'created environment' is therefore their area of concern. Like peace movements, they are not completely new. In the nineteenth century, ecological movements were linked with romanticism and were mainly intended to 'counter the impact of modern industry on traditional modes of production and upon the landscape'. In the late twentieth century they assumed greater prominence, partly because of the increased risks associated with possible global ecological catastrophes (such as global warming, and the depletion of the ozone layer).

Conclusion

Giddens therefore sees globalization (see pp. 630–1) and increases in risk as major factors leading to the increasing prominence of social movements concerned with peace and ecology. However, he stresses that such movements are not entirely new, and nor have they replaced other actors as a source of power or the location of political activity.

To Giddens, party politics, the nation-state, and the economic power of business remain crucially important in high-modern societies. Discussing how power can be exercised to improve modern societies, he says:

> *Peace movements, for example, might be important in consciousness raising and in achieving tactical goals in respect of military threats. Other influences, however, including the force of public opinion, the policies of business corporations and national governments, and the activities of international organisations, are fundamental to the achieving of basic reforms.*
>
> Giddens, 1990, p. 162

Social movements might be increasingly important, but they have not eclipsed or replaced other political arenas.

Evaluation

Giddens's views are based upon a rather abstract model of modernity and its institutional dimensions, which is not really supported by detailed empirical evidence. Because his discussion is pitched at a high level of generality, he goes into little detail about such issues as the background and objectives of those who join social movements, and the way they are organized.

Nevertheless, his work is useful because it shows an awareness of continuities in the development of politics and social movements, which are neglected by some other writers – writers who may exaggerate the degree to which such movements are genuinely novel.

Voting behaviour

If Giddens's analysis is correct, then the state remains an important source of power, and party politics remains at least as important as the campaigns of social movements. In parliamentary democracies governments are formed through competition between political parties in elections. This process is the subject of this section, which focuses on patterns of voting in Britain.

Butler and Stokes – partisan alignment

Until the 1970s, patterns of voting in post-war Britain were predictable. Most psephologists (those who study voting behaviour) agreed on the basic characteristics of British voting and on the explanation of these characteristics. David Butler and Donald Stokes (1974) were perhaps the most influential psephologists during the 1960s and early 1970s and their views became widely accepted.

There were two main features of the British political system at this time: partisan alignment and a two-party system. These were closely related to each other and, together, seemed to make it relatively easy to explain British voting.

Class and partisan alignment

The theory of partisan alignment (strong adherence to a particular party) explained voting in the following way:

1 It suggested that class, as measured by a person's occupation, was the most important influence on voting.
2 It claimed that most voters had a strongly partisan self-image: they thought of themselves as 'Labour' or 'Conservative'.
3 This sense of identity led to voters consistently casting their votes for the party with which they identified. Few people changed their votes from election to election, there was little electoral volatility, and there were few floating voters who were prepared to consider changing their allegiance.

Using the evidence from Butler and Stokes's research into the 1964 election, Ivor Crewe found that 62 per cent of non-manual workers voted Conservative, and 64 per cent of manual workers voted Labour (Sarlvick and Crewe, 1983).

Butler and Stokes themselves produced a range of figures which appeared to confirm that most voters had a strongly partisan self-image, and that this self-image was closely related to voting. In 1964, for example, only 5 per cent of those they questioned did not claim to identify with a party. Of those who did identify with a party only 12 per cent said they identified 'not very strongly', while 41 per cent identified 'fairly strongly' and 47 per cent 'very strongly'. In the local elections in May 1963, 85 per cent of those with a Conservative partisan self-image voted Conservative, and 95 per cent of those who identified with the Labour Party voted Labour.

The strength of these political ties was reflected in the low swings (percentage changes in votes) between Conservative and Labour in successive elections. In the general elections of the 1950s the average swing was just 1.6 per cent. Few people changed the party they voted for because of the strength of their attachment to one or other of the major parties. As late as 1974 Butler and Stokes felt justified in saying 'class has supplied the dominant basis of party allegiance in the recent past'.

The two-party system

The second main feature of British voting patterns, the two-party system, was perhaps even more striking: together the Labour and Conservative parties dominated the political scene. In no election between 1945 and 1966 did their combined vote fall below 87.5 per cent of those cast, and the third most popular party, the Liberals, gained in excess of 10 per cent of the vote only once (in 1964).

The results did not surprise psephologists. If class determined voting, and there were two classes, then inevitably there would be two dominant parties to represent those classes. The Conservatives gained so many votes because middle-class non-manual voters identified with that party, while the Labour Party enjoyed similar levels of support among working-class manual voters. There was little room left for a third party. The Liberals were not believed to represent any particular class, and therefore could not rely on strongly partisan support from any particular section of the electorate. This was reflected in the very low vote they received in some elections: in 1951 the Liberals gained only 2.5 per cent of the votes cast.

Political socialization

So far we have examined the evidence for partisan alignment and the existence of a two-party system. However, this does not explain why there should be such a strong relationship between class and voting.

The explanation provided by Butler and Stokes was essentially very simple. To them, political socialization held the key to explaining voting. As children learned the culture of their society, they also learned the political views of parents and others with whom they came into contact. Butler and Stokes stated quite emphatically that 'A child is very likely indeed to share the parents' party preference.'

They saw the family as the most important agent of socialization, but, by the time an individual was old enough to vote, other socializing institutions would have had an effect as well. Butler and Stokes argued that schooling, residential area, occupation and whether they belonged to a union would all influence the way people voted. The Conservative Party could expect to get most support from those who:

1 attended grammar or public schools;
2 lived in middle-class areas where many people were homeowners;
3 were not members of unions.

Labour support would be most likely to come from those who:

1 attended secondary modern schools;
2 lived in working-class areas (and particularly on council estates);
3 were union members.

The most important factor, though, was whether voters had a manual or non-manual occupation.

All of these factors were important because they influenced the extent to which voters came into contact with members of different classes and therefore whether they mixed with partisan Labour or Conservative supporters. Generally speaking, all of these factors reinforced the effects of the voter's class background. For instance, children with parents who voted Labour were more likely to go to secondary modern schools and become trade union members.

In emphasizing the effects of socialization, Butler and Stokes were denying that the policy preferences of an individual were important. Voters were not thought to pay much attention to the detailed policies outlined in party manifestos. They did not choose who to vote for on the basis of a rational assessment of which package of policies on offer would benefit them most. They voted emotionally, as an expression of their commitment to a particular party. To the extent that they had preferences for policies, these were largely shaped by the parties themselves: voters would trust their party to implement the best policies.

The 'problem' of deviant voters

The partisan alignment theory of voting was so widely accepted that in 1967 Peter Pulzer claimed that 'Class is the basis of British party politics; all else is embellishment and detail' (Pulzer, 1967). However, the partisan alignment theory could not explain the existence of deviant voters: those who did not conform to the general pattern.

Throughout the post-war period a significant number of the British electorate have been deviant voters. Deviant voters are normally defined as manual workers who do not vote Labour, and non-manual workers who do not vote Conservative. In other words, deviant voters are those who do not vote for the party which is generally seen as representing their class.

The precise number of deviant voters fluctuated between elections, but generally there have been considerably more manual workers who did not vote Labour than non-manual workers who did not vote Conservative. According to Ivor Crewe, in the 1959 election 34 per cent of manual workers voted Conservative and 22 per cent of non-manual workers voted Labour (Sarlvick and Crewe, 1983).

The existence of deviant voters was important to psephologists both because of their political significance and the challenge they posed for the dominant partisan alignment theory:

1 They were politically important because they were central to determining the results of elections. (For most of the period since the war, manual workers have formed a majority of the population; if there had been no deviant voters, the Labour Party would have won every election.)
2 They were important for theories of voting because their existence seemed to directly contradict the claim that class was the basis of politics.
3 Consequently, considerable attention was devoted to studying these voters and explaining their behaviour.

Deferential voters

One of the earliest explanations of working-class Conservative voting was given in the late nineteenth century by Walter Bagehot. He argued that the British are typically deferential to authority and prone to defer decision making to those 'born to rule' whom they believe 'know better'. Hence the attraction of the Conservative Party which, particularly in the nineteenth century, was largely staffed from the ranks of the landed gentry, the wealthy and the privileged. The Conservatives represented traditional authority, and Bagehot argued that party image, rather than specific policies, was the major factor affecting voting behaviour. This led to the existence of the deferential voter.

In the early 1960s, Robert McKenzie and Alan Silver (1972) investigated the relationship between deferential attitudes and working-class support for the Conservative Party. They claimed that deference accounted for the voting behaviour of about half the working-class Tories in their sample.

Secular voters

Those working-class Tories whose support for the Conservative Party could not be accounted for by deferential attitudes were termed secular voters by McKenzie and Silver. Secular voters' attachment to the Conservative Party was based on pragmatic, practical considerations. They evaluated party policy and based their support on the tangible benefits, such as higher living standards, that they hoped to gain. They voted Conservative because of a belief in that party's superior executive and administrative ability.

McKenzie and Silver suggested that working-class support for the Conservatives had an increasingly secular rather than a deferential basis. They argued that this change helped to explain the increasing volatility of British voting patterns. Secular voters

were unlikely to vote simply on the basis of party loyalty. Almost all the deferentials but only half the seculars stated that they would definitely vote Conservative in the next election. The seculars were waiting to judge specific policies rather than basing their vote on traditional party loyalties.

The theory of the secular voter proved to be highly influential and is very similar to many later theories of voting. McKenzie and Silver believed that secular voters made up quite a small, though increasing, section of the electorate. However, despite their small numbers, they represented a fundamental challenge to the partisan alignment theory since their motives for voting for a particular party were quite different from those of a partisan party supporter.

Contradictory socializing influences

Butler and Rose (1960) offered some explanations of deviant voting which were quite consistent with the theory of partisan alignment. They suggested that contradictory socializing influences on individuals would reduce their sense of loyalty to the party of their class. If, for example, one parent voted Labour and the other Conservative, there would be a considerable chance of their children becoming deviant voters in later life. Social mobility could also lead to deviant voting if individuals ended up in a different class to that of their parents. For example, individuals from a working-class background who experienced upward social mobility and gained middle-class jobs might vote according to their background rather than according to their current class position.

Embourgeoisement

Another explanation of deviant voting, which was broadly consistent with the theory of partisan alignment, suggested that a change was taking place within the working class. After the Labour Party was defeated in a third consecutive election in 1959, some psephologists began to consider the possibility that defeat had become inevitable for Labour in general elections.

Butler and Rose suggested that one section of the manual workforce was increasingly adopting middle-class attitudes and lifestyles. Affluent workers were enjoying living standards equal or even superior to those of the middle class, and consequently were more likely to identify themselves as middle-class and support the Conservative Party. (This argument is a version of the embourgeoisement theory which we discussed in Chapter 2.) In effect, Butler and Rose were suggesting, not that partisan alignment was less strong, but that the boundary between the middle and working classes had shifted so that some manual workers could now be considered middle-class.

A study by Eric Nordlinger (1966) found no support for this explanation. The Labour voters in Nordlinger's sample earned on average slightly more than the working-class Tories, although the factor which appeared to differentiate the two groups was not income as such, but the *degree of satisfaction* with income. Working-class Tories were found to be much more satisfied with their levels of income than their Labour counterparts. Satisfaction would lead to a desire to maintain the status quo, and hence support for the Conservative Party with its more traditional image. Dissatisfaction would lead to a desire for change, and hence support for Labour, with its image as the party of change.

The argument that working-class affluence leads to Conservative voting was further discredited by Goldthorpe *et al.*'s study of affluent workers in Luton (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1968a). Goldthorpe *et al.* found that affluence does not lead to middle-class identification nor to support for the Conservative Party. Of the affluent workers in Luton who voted in the 1955 and 1959 elections, nearly 80 per cent voted Labour, which is a significantly greater percentage than for the working class as a whole.

Goldthorpe *et al.* found that the most common reason given for Labour support was 'a general "working-class" identification with Labour' and a feeling that the Labour Party more closely represented the interests of the 'working man'. However, there appeared to be little of the deep-seated party loyalty which is supposed to be characteristic of the traditional working class. Like their attitude to work, the Luton workers' support for Labour was largely instrumental. They were primarily concerned with the pay-off for themselves in terms of higher living standards.

Cross-class attachments

Goldthorpe *et al.* argue that affluence as such reveals little about working-class political attitudes. They maintain:

> *the understanding of contemporary working-class politics is found, first and foremost, in the structure of the worker's group attachments, and not, as many have suggested, in the extent of his income and possessions.*
>
> Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1968a

The importance of 'group attachments' is borne out by their research. Those affluent workers who voted Conservative usually had white-collar connections. Either their parents, siblings or wives had white-collar jobs or they themselves had previously been employed in a white-collar occupation. These 'bridges' to the middle class appeared to be the most important factor in accounting for working-class

Conservatism in the Luton sample. Attachments with and exposure to members of another class seemed to have a strong influence on cross-class voting.

This idea was developed by Frank Parkin (1968). He argues that, through greater exposure to members of the middle class than their Labour counterparts, working-class Tories internalized the dominant value system which the Conservative Party represents.

Bob Jessop (1974) found support for this view from a survey conducted in the early 1970s. He argued that members of the working class vote Conservative 'because they are relatively isolated from the structural conditions favourable to radicalism and Labour voting' – that is, from the conditions which serve to insulate manual workers from the middle class and the dominant value system. Such structural conditions are found in their most extreme form in the mining, shipbuilding and dock industries. Traditionally, workers in these industries formed occupational communities in single-industry towns. Insulation from members of the middle class both at work and in the community led to the development of a working-class subculture which provided an alternative to the dominant value system. In this setting, strong loyalties to the Labour Party developed.

These views did nothing to alter the widespread acceptance of the partisan alignment theory of voting. In line with that theory, writers such as Parkin tried to explain deviant voting in terms of political socialization. They added to the sophistication of the theory by examining situations in which individuals might experience contradictory socializing influences, but they did not change the basic framework within which voting was explained.

Middle-class radicals

Frank Parkin (1968) was one of the few writers who also analysed the reasons for deviant voting by middle-class Labour supporters. His explanation was quite different from that for working-class Conservatism. He found that these middle-class radicals were likely to have occupations 'in which there is a primary emphasis upon either the notion of service to the community, human betterment or welfare and the like or upon self-expression and creativity'. Such occupations include teaching and social work. Since Labour is seen as the party mainly concerned with social welfare, voting Labour is a means of furthering the ideals which led people to select these occupations.

Middle-class Labour voters tend to be outside the mainstream of capitalism. Parkin states that their 'life chances rest primarily upon intellectual attainment and personal qualifications, not upon ownership of property or inherited wealth'. As such they have no vested interest in private industry, which the Conservative Party is seen to represent.

In this case, individuals were seen to be voting for the party that was most likely to serve their interests and beliefs. They were not voting according to political socialization: they themselves were actively evaluating what the competing parties had to offer.

Parkin's explanation for this group of deviant voters comes closer to the theories of voting that were to become popular in the 1970s and 1980s than to the theory of Butler and Stokes. In the next section we will look at various attempts to analyse the patterns of voting in Britain since 1974.

Patterns of voting since 1974

During the 1970s, and particularly from 1974 onwards, important changes started to take place in the pattern of British voting. In the following sections we will outline briefly the changes that took place and then examine possible explanations for these changes:

1 The first major change appeared to be the declining influence of class on voting behaviour. The distinction between manual and non-manual workers no longer appeared to account for the way most of the electorate voted. There seemed to be much more volatility than in early elections, with a substantial proportion of the electorate changing the party it voted for from election to election.

2 The second and closely related change was the rapid increase in the numbers of deviant voters. Studies suggest that in the 1983 and 1987 elections a minority of manual workers voted Labour, while the Conservative share of the non-manual vote has been less than 60 per cent in every election since 1974.

3 The third change may help to explain the second: Britain might have changed from a two-party to a three-party system. In 1981 four leading members of the Labour Party broke away to form the new Social Democratic Party. They then joined with the Liberal Party to fight the 1983 election together. The resulting Alliance succeeded in gaining 26.1 per cent of the votes cast, only just over 2 per cent behind Labour's 28.3 per cent share. For the first time since the war the combined Labour and Conservative stranglehold over voting was seriously threatened. A third party (or in this case an alliance of two 'third' parties) seemed to have a real chance of forming a government at some future date.

The Alliance did less well in 1987 but still polled 22.6 per cent of the votes cast. After 1987 the Liberals and the SDP merged to form the Liberal Democrats. In 1992 their vote declined further to 18.3 per cent, but this was still much higher than their share of the vote in any election between 1945 and 1970. In 1997 their vote increased marginally to 18.6 per cent, but the number of seats they won jumped up to 46, twice as many as in their previous best post-war performance (23 seats in 1983).

4 The final change that appeared to be taking place was the decline of the Labour Party. Labour had done badly in 1979, gaining only 36.9 per cent of the votes cast, but the 1983 result was even more disastrous. At that election Labour received a lower share of the popular vote than at any time since 1918. It even seemed as if Labour could hardly be considered a national party any longer: it won only three non-London seats in the entire south-east of England. Labour's strength was increasingly confined to the traditional heartlands of its support in the depressed industrial regions of Wales, Scotland and the north of England.

A number of commentators speculated that Labour's decline might be permanent. If conventional explanations of voting behaviour were correct, then a number of social changes were threatening the basis of the Labour vote. By 1983 non-manual workers outnumbered manual workers. Employment in industry, and particularly 'heavy' industries such as mining and shipbuilding, was declining. This was precisely where Labour had traditionally enjoyed its most loyal support. As early as 1981 Peter Kellner claimed that 'the sense of class solidarity which propelled Labour to victory in 1945 has all but evaporated' (Kellner, 1981).

As we will see, the view that Labour was in permanent decline was hardly borne out by the result of the 1997 election.

We will now consider a number of attempts to explain these changes. As psephologists took account of the alterations in voting behaviour, the emphasis placed upon political socialization by Butler and Stokes was increasingly rejected. It was replaced by an emphasis on the policy preferences of individual voters.

Bo Sarlvik and Ivor Crewe – partisan dealignment

Ivor Crewe was amongst the first commentators to criticize the approach of Butler and Stokes and to identify changing trends in British voting. In this section we will discuss his work with Bo Sarlvik, published in 1983. In later sections we will review Crewe's work on the 1987 and 1992 elections.

Sarlvik and Crewe argued that Butler and Stokes could not explain the reduction of class-based voting since 1974. Evidence suggested that embourgeoisement could not account for the decline in partisanship. Nor could Sarlvik and Crewe find any evidence that there had been a sudden and dramatic increase in voters whose parents had different party loyalties. They accepted that there had been more social mobility, but it was nothing like enough to account for the rise in deviant voting.

The decline in partisan voting

Tables 9.5 and 9.6 summarize some of the main findings of the *British Election Studies*, which have been conducted by a number of different researchers using survey techniques to collect standardized information about a large sample of voters. (The 1997 figures are based on a BBC/NOP exit poll.) The findings appear to confirm Crewe's theory that partisan dealignment has taken place in Britain.

Sarlvik and Crewe originally defined partisan dealignment as a situation where:

> *none of the major occupational groups now provides the same degree of solid and consistent support for one of the two major parties as was the case in the earlier post-war period.*
>
> Sarlvick and Crewe, 1983

In later writings, however, Crewe distinguished between partisan dealignment and class dealignment. Partisan dealignment referred to a decline in the percentage of the electorate who had a strong sense of loyalty to a particular party; class dealignment referred to a decline in the relationship between the working class and Labour voting and the middle class and Conservative voting.

Table 9.6 shows different measures of the strength of the relationship between class and voting, including a measure of the amount of absolute class voting. This is the percentage of voters who were middle-class and voted Conservative or who were working-class and voted Labour. In other words, it measures the percentage of non-deviant voters. In 1983 non-manual Labour voters were in a minority of voters at 47 per cent.

The Alford Index is another measure of the degree to which class influences voting, on a scale of 1 to 100. For Labour, if the score were 100, then all manual workers who voted would vote Labour. If the score were 0, Labour would gain the same proportion of votes in the middle class as in the working class. For the Conservatives, if the score were 100, then all non-manual workers who voted would vote Conservative. If the score were 0, the Conservatives would gain the same proportion of votes in the working class as in the middle class. By this measure, the decline in partisan voting in the working class

Table 9.5 Occupational class and party choice, 1964–97 (per cent)

	1964		1966		1970	
	Non-manual	Manual	Non-manual	Manual	Non-manual	Manual
Conservative	62	28	60	25	64	33
Labour	22	64	26	69	25	58
Liberal	16	8	14	6	11	9

	February 1974		October 1974		1979	
	Non-manual	Manual	Non-manual	Manual	Non-manual	Manual
Conservative	53	24	51	24	60	35
Labour	22	57	25	57	23	50
Liberal	25	19	24	20	17	15

	1983		1987		1992		1997	
	Non-manual	Manual	Non-manual	Manual	Non-manual	Manual	Non-manual	Manual
Conservative	55	35	54	35	56	36	37	24
Labour	17	42	20	45	24	51	37	58
Liberal, etc.	28	22	27	21	21	14	20	13

Source: D. Denver (1994) *Elections and Voting Behaviour in Britain*, 2nd edition, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, p. 61; and D. Denver (1997) 'The results: how Britain voted', in A. Geddes and J. Tonge (eds) *Labour's Landslide*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, p. 175.

Table 9.6 Measures of class voting, 1964–92

	Alford index (Labour)	Alford index (Conservative)	Absolute class voting
1964	42	34	63
1966	43	35	66
1970	33	31	60
Feb 1974	35	29	55
Oct 1974	32	27	54
1979	27	25	55
1983	25	20	47
1987	25	19	49
1992	27	20	54

Source: D. Denver (1994) *Elections and Voting Behaviour in Britain*, 2nd edition, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, p. 62.

has been dramatic. It fell substantially between 1964 and 1983, dropping from 42 to 25.

From such evidence, Sarlvik and Crewe concluded that most voters were no longer strongly loyal to a party on the basis of their class, and that there was much greater volatility in the electorate. In the four elections of the 1970s, for example, less than half of the electorate (47 per cent) voted Labour or voted Conservative four times in a row.

The causes of partisan dealignment

First, Sarlvik and Crewe argued, factors other than class seemed to be increasingly related to voting. Such factors included whether voters rented or owned their housing, and whether they were members of trade unions. In 1979 the Conservatives were 51 per cent ahead of Labour among non-manual workers who were not in trade unions, but only 7 per cent ahead of those who were members. Labour was 33 per cent ahead of the Conservatives among manual trade union members, but actually 1 per cent behind among non-union manual workers.

Sarlvik and Crewe believed that class boundaries were being blurred by factors such as these. There were fewer 'pure' members of the working class who had manual jobs, lived in council houses and belonged to trade unions; and fewer 'pure' members of the middle class who had non-manual jobs and were non-unionized. The increasing numbers of unionists in the middle class and the increasing numbers of homeowners in the working class had reduced the level of partisan alignment among individuals with the traditional party of their class, and had resulted in class dealignment as well.

The second explanation of partisan dealignment put forward by Sarlvik and Crewe provided a more fundamental challenge to the theories of Butler and Stokes. They argued that it was misleading simply to see the voters as captives of their socialization, unable to make rational choices about which party to vote for. Instead, Sarlvik and Crewe claimed that voters' active decisions about which party's policies best suited them had to be included in any explanation of voting. From their analysis of the 1979 general election, Sarlvik and Crewe argued that 'voters' opinions on policies and on the parties' performances in office "explain" almost twice as much as all the social and economic characteristics taken together'.

According to Sarlvik and Crewe, the main reason why the Conservatives won in 1979 was simply that the electorate was unimpressed with the performance of the previous Labour government and supported most Conservative policies. Some issues were particularly important. Sarlvik and Crewe found that Conservative proposals designed to limit the power of trade unions and plans to privatize some state-funded industries were the most important policies which persuaded Labour voters to switch to the Conservatives.

Despite the significance Sarlvik and Crewe attached to the policy preferences and active choices of the electorate, they did not claim that class was of no importance. They stated that 'The relationships between individuals' social status and their choice of party have by no means vanished. But as determinants of voting they carry less weight than before.' Traditional theories could not be completely rejected: Sarlvik and Crewe still saw class as the most important aspect of a person's social status, but parties which wished to win elections could not just rely on the loyalty of their supporters – their policies had to appeal to voters as well.

Himmelweit, Humphreys and Jaeger – a consumer model of voting

Some psephologists went much further than Sarlvik and Crewe in rejecting the partisan alignment theory of voting. Himmelweit, Humphreys and Jaeger (1985) based their findings upon their own longitudinal study of voting, which followed a group of men who were 21 in 1959, through to the October election of 1974.

In their book *How Voters Decide* Himmelweit *et al.* argued that an understanding of voting should be based on analysing members of the electorate's deliberate selection of a party to vote for, and not on political socialization. They emphasized the rational choices made by voters. They believed that people decided how to vote by deciding what they wanted, and how far each party met their requirements.

To explain this theory, Himmelweit *et al.* compared an elector's choice of party with a consumer making a purchase. For example, someone choosing a new car will take a number of factors into account, such as price, comfort, performance, size, running costs and reliability. Some factors will be more important to a particular individual than others: one potential purchaser might put most emphasis on price and running costs, while another is primarily concerned with performance and size. Consumer choice is not always easy: you might want both cheapness and high quality. If you cannot have both, you will have to compromise.

Himmelweit *et al.* argue that choosing a party involves the same sort of process. Certain policies will be more important to you than others. One party will come closer to your views in their stated policy than another. No single party is likely to advocate all the single policies that you support. Consequently you will have to weigh up which party offers the most attractive package, taking into account the importance you attach to each issue.

Of course, a voter may not have 'perfect knowledge' of all the policies on offer, but there is more to buying products than examining the labels and listening to the claims of advertisers. Potential purchasers may have had some previous experience of the product and if it has proved satisfactory in the past they are more likely to buy it again, even if it is not exactly suited to their needs. In a similar way, voters have experience of previous governments and they can judge the parties on the basis of past performance. One reason for the rise in 'deviant' voting, according to Himmelweit *et al.*, was the increasingly negative judgements made by voters on the parties they had previously chosen: they decided to opt for new brands because their old choices proved so unsatisfactory.

The image Himmelweit *et al.* provided of the voters, then, is of very calculating individuals trying to achieve their objectives as best they can. However, they did not altogether dismiss more emotional factors in voting. These factors can be compared to brand loyalty, and advice from friends and relatives about products. You may identify with a particular product which you have used before and which you trust; you may also be influenced by what people you know tell you about products, and their recommendations. Similarly, when voting, you may have some loyalty to a party, and you may be influenced by the political preferences of others.

However, these factors (which are similar to Butler and Stokes's concepts of party alignment and

political socialization) were considered of little importance by Himmelweit *et al.* They argued that such factors were only important if your policy preferences cancelled each other out. In other words, only if two or more parties offered you equally attractive sets of policies would you be influenced by party loyalty or the opinion of others. By 1974, Himmelweit *et al.* thought that party loyalty had a minimal impact on the electorate, although they accepted that it may have been more important before then.

Himmelweit *et al.* provided statistical support for their consumer model of voting. They claimed that 80 per cent of voting in the October 1974 election could be predicted on the basis of their model.

If Himmelweit *et al.*'s theory is correct, it has important implications for the political parties. It suggests that all the parties have a chance of winning elections if they can tailor their policies to fit those preferred by a majority of the electorate. Regardless of how badly Labour did in 1983, such a consumer model does not suggest that its decline is necessarily permanent or irreversible. According to this theory of voting, the parties are competing for the votes of the whole of the electorate, and not just for those of a small number of floating voters.

Criticisms

This radical new explanation of voting has been heavily criticized. Paul Whiteley (1983) describes the study as unreliable, since it was based on a small and unrepresentative section of the population. By 1974, Himmelweit *et al.*'s sample consisted of just 178 respondents, all of whom were male, aged about 37, and some 75 per cent of whom were non-manual workers. It cannot be assumed that the factors influencing the voting of this group will be typical of the factors influencing the voting of the rest of the population.

A more fundamental objection to explaining voting in terms of policy preference is raised by David Marsh (1983). He points out that this type of explanation cannot fully account for voting unless it explains why people prefer certain policies in the first place. These types of theory deny the importance of class, but fail to suggest alternative influences on the choice of policy.

Heath, Jowell and Curtice – the continuing importance of class

Heath *et al.*'s conclusions contradict those of many other psephologists because they use different and more sophisticated research methods (Heath, Jowell and Curtice, 1985).

Redefining class

The first, and perhaps most important, methodological change involves the definition and measurement of class. Heath *et al.* argue that defining the middle class as non-manual workers and the working class as manual workers is theoretically inadequate. They claim that classes can be more adequately defined in terms of economic interests, that is, according to their situation in the labour market. They therefore use a version of John Goldthorpe's neo-Weberian class scheme to distinguish five classes. (See pp. 114–17 for further details of Goldthorpe's class scheme.)

The five classes are:

1 The salariat, which consists of managers, administrators, professionals and semi-professionals who have either considerable authority within the workplace or considerable autonomy within work.

2 Routine non-manual workers, who lack authority in the workplace and often have low wages.

3 The petty bourgeoisie, which consists of farmers, the owners of small businesses, and self-employed manual workers. Their situation depends upon the market forces that relate to the goods and services they supply. They are not wage labourers and they are not affected in the same way as other workers by employment and promotion prospects. This group cuts across the usual division between manual and non-manual workers.

4 'Foremen' and technicians, who either supervise other workers or who have more autonomy within work than the fifth class.

5 Manual workers – Heath *et al.* do not separate manual workers in terms of the degree of skill their job requires since they do not believe that skill levels have a significant impact on voting.

Apart from using new class categories, another important feature of Heath *et al.*'s work is the way they deal with the voting of women. Nearly all of the previous studies classified women voters according to the occupation of their husband if they were married. Heath *et al.* argue that women's own experience of the workplace will have a greater impact on their voting than that of their husband.

Table 9.7 summarizes Heath *et al.*'s findings on class voting in the 1983 election.

The continuing importance of class

The results suggest a stronger relationship between class and voting (in 1983) than the results of studies using conventional definitions of class:

1 The working class remained a stronghold of Labour support.

2 'Foremen' and technicians (who would normally be categorized as part of the skilled working class) were strongly Conservative.

Table 9.7 Class voting in the 1983 election

Class	Conservative	Labour	Alliance	Others
Petty bourgeoisie	71%	12%	17%	0%
Salariat	54%	14%	31%	1%
Foremen/ Technicians	48%	26%	25%	1%
Routine non-manual	46%	25%	27%	2%
Working class	30%	49%	30%	1%

Source: A. Heath, R. Jowell and J. Curtice (1985) *How Britain Votes*, Pergamon, Oxford, p. 20

3 The petty bourgeoisie (some of whom would normally be defined as manual workers) were the strongest Conservative supporters.

4 The salariat and routine non-manual workers gave most of their support to the Conservatives, but it was also in these classes (as well as in the working class) that the Alliance gained its greatest share of the votes.

Examining the results of one election does not reveal whether or not class-based voting has declined. Heath *et al.* therefore attempt to measure the strength of the relationship between class and voting since 1964. It is more difficult to measure this relationship using a fivefold division of the population into classes, so they decided to measure the strength of the relationship between class and voting by measuring the likelihood of the salariat voting Conservative and the working class voting Labour.

From their figures they calculated an odds ratio which determines the relative likelihood of a class voting for the party it could be expected to. The figures in Table 9.8 show how many times more likely it is for the working class to vote Labour and the salariat to vote Conservative than vice versa.

Table 9.8 produced some unexpected findings. There appear to have been wide variations in the relationship between class and voting, but no long-term dealignment. According to this measurement, 1983 was an average election and not a year in which the influence of class was at its lowest since the Second World War.

Table 9.8 Odds ratio for working class voting Labour and salariat voting Conservative in general elections, 1964–83

Election	1964	1966	1970	1974 (Feb)	1974 (Oct)	1979	1983
Odds ratio	9.3	7.3	3.9	6.1	5.5	4.9	6.3

Source: Adapted from A. Heath, R. Jowell and J. Curtice (1985) *How Britain Votes*, Pergamon, Oxford, p. 20

Changes in the class structure

Heath *et al.* claim that much of the change in levels of support for the different parties is the result of changes in the distribution of the population between classes. For example, the working class has shrunk as a proportion of the electorate while the salariat and routine non-manual groups have grown. However, changes in the class structure alone cannot explain all the changes in levels of support for the parties in elections. Heath *et al.* calculated what percentage of the votes each party would have gained in 1983 if they had kept the same levels of support in each class as they had in 1964. The results are summarized in Table 9.9.

Table 9.9 Changes in party support 1964–83 and the predicted share of the vote in 1983 if parties had retained the same level of support in each class from 1964

	Labour	Conservative	Liberal Alliance
% vote 1964	44	43	11
% vote 1983	28	42	25
Predicted % vote in 1983 given changes in the class structure	37	48.5	12.5

Source: Adapted from A. Heath, R. Jowell and J. Curtice (1985) *How Britain Votes*, Pergamon, Oxford, p. 20

On these figures, the Labour Party did even worse than expected, the Conservative Party failed to take advantage of changes in the social structure, while the increase in Liberal/Alliance support was far greater than would be anticipated. Consequently Heath *et al.* conclude that factors other than changes in the social structure must have affected patterns of voting.

Rejection of consumer theory

Heath *et al.* reject the view that detailed policy preferences account for these changes. They measured people's views on various policies and asked them where they thought the major parties stood on these issues. They also asked voters which issues they thought were most important:

1 Unemployment and inflation came top of the list, and on both Labour had the most popular policies.

2 The Alliance proved most popular on the third most important issue (whether there should be more

spending on welfare or tax cuts), while Labour and the Conservatives tied a little way behind.

3 Conservative and Alliance policies proved most popular on the fourth most important issue, defence.

On the basis of this evidence, Labour should have won a handsome victory. If the six most important issues were taken into account, Labour and the Conservatives would have received the same share of the vote. Heath *et al.* therefore reject the consumer theory of voting; their evidence suggests that it cannot explain the Conservative victory in 1983.

Party images

Despite rejecting the consumer theory, Heath *et al.* do not deny that the actions taken by a political party affect the vote it obtains, but they believe that it is not the party's detailed policies that matter, but its overall political stance in the eyes of the electorate. They say, 'It is not the small print of the manifesto but the overall perception of the party's character that counts.' If voters believe that a party has the same basic ideology as they have, they will be likely to vote for it. From this point of view, Labour lost so badly in 1983 because many voters believed it had moved too far to the left, despite the extent to which they agreed with its policies.

Class, ideology and voting behaviour

Heath *et al.* use a more complex model of ideology than the simple left/right distinction that is usually employed. They argue that there are two main dimensions to ideological differences on issues:

1 Class issues are mainly economic: they concern such questions as whether industries should be nationalized or privatized, and whether income and wealth should be redistributed. The ideology which supports nationalization and redistribution can be called left-wing, and the opposite right-wing.

2 Liberal issues concern non-economic questions such as whether there should be a death penalty, whether Britain should retain or abandon nuclear weapons, and whether there should be a strong law-and-order policy or not. For the sake of convenience, the ideology which supports the death penalty, the retention of nuclear weapons and strong law-and-order policies will be called 'tough', while its opposite will be called 'tender'.

In terms of these differences, the Labour Party supports left-wing and tender policies, the Conservative Party supports right-wing and tough policies, and (according to Heath *et al.*) the Alliance was perhaps slightly to the right of centre on class issues and more tender than tough on liberal issues. Liberal supporters have a distinctive ideological position and, according to Heath *et al.*, it is one that is becoming increasingly popular with the electorate.

From their analysis of changes in voters' ideology, Heath *et al.* find that there have been distinct shifts. On average, voters increasingly support right-wing economic policies, but more tender social policies. These changes seem to have benefited the Alliance more than the other major parties, both of whom have experienced a significant move away from their ideology on one of the two dimensions. The study finds that the main reason for the high level of Alliance support in 1983 was the increasing proportion of voters whose ideological position roughly coincided with that party's.

Summary

The complex and highly sophisticated theory of voting devised by Heath *et al.* differs from both the partisan alignment and consumer theories. Class remains very important but it does not directly determine the party voted for. It is not specific policies that matter, but the class of the voters and how they perceive the ideological position of the parties. From this point of view, the prospects for the parties in the future will be partly determined by changes in the class structure, but they can also affect their chances of success by the way they present themselves to the electorate.

Criticisms of Heath, Jowell and Curtice

Ivor Crewe (1986) has attacked the work of Heath *et al.* In particular he criticizes their use of an odds ratio table based upon the chances of the working class voting Labour and the salariat voting Conservative. Crewe says, 'their odds ratio is a two-party measure applied to a three-party system'. It fails to take account of the growth of support for centre parties – the Liberals and the Alliance – in the elections of 1979 and 1983. Furthermore, Crewe points out that in 1983 the working class and the salariat combined made up a minority of the electorate (45 per cent).

The response to criticisms

Heath *et al.* (1987) have answered these criticisms. They argue that odds ratios are more appropriate for measuring the relationship between class and voting than the class index of voting used by Crewe. In Crewe's index all voters who do not vote Conservative or Labour are seen as a kind of deviant voter and are used as evidence that classes have lost their 'social cohesion or political potential'.

Heath *et al.* point out that the centre parties can increase their share of the vote without any change in social classes. For example, if the Labour or Conservative Party change their policies, and thereby appeal less to potential centre-party voters, they can

lose support without the electorate changing their views. Heath *et al.*'s odds ratio avoids this problem because the level of support for centre parties does not directly affect the ratio. It measures the strength of class-based voting in the class-based parties. It does not fall into the trap of assuming that a vote cast for somebody other than a Labour or Conservative Party candidate indicates a decline in the relationship between class and voting.

Heath *et al.* are happy to acknowledge that the odds ratio used in their original study measured the relationship between class and voting in a minority of the electorate. To counter this problem they calculated odds ratios for a number of other classes. They found the same 'trendless fluctuations' in the relationship between class and voting revealed in their original study. Once again they discovered no evidence that class was exerting less influence on voting behaviour than it had in the past.

Ivor Crewe – the 1987 election and social divisions

According to Crewe's figures, in 1987 the percentage of people voting for the party representing their class increased marginally (Crewe, 1987a, 1987b). Compared to 1983 the combined percentage of non-manual Labour voters rose from 47 per cent to 48 per cent. Nevertheless, deviant voters still made up a majority of the electorate (52 per cent). Crewe argues that the election largely confirms his analysis of trends in voting behaviour. He claims it shows that divisions continue to grow within both the middle and working classes.

Divisions in the middle class

Using data from a Gallup survey commissioned by the BBC, Crewe found that the Conservatives lost support in the middle class. In both the 'core' middle class of professionals, administrators and managers, and the 'lower' middle class of office and clerical workers, the Conservative vote fell 3 per cent compared to 1983. These data would seem to suggest that the Conservative Party was losing support from all sections of the middle class. However, Crewe claimed to have discovered a major split in the class between university-educated and public-sector non-manual workers on the one hand, and non-university-educated and private-sector non-manual workers on the other. As Table 9.10 shows, the Conservatives lost 9 per cent of their vote amongst the university-educated middle class and 4 per cent amongst those working in the public sector.

Thus Crewe believes that 'new divisions' are opening up in the middle class. Education and the sector in which individuals work are both starting to exercise a strong influence on voting patterns, resulting in an increasingly divided middle class.

Table 9.10 The new divisions in the middle class: voting in 1987

	University-educated		Public sector		Private sector	
	1987	1983–7	1987	1983–7	1987	1983–7
Conservative	34%	–9%	44%	–4%	65%	+1%
Labour	29%	+3%	24%	–	13%	–
Liberal/SDP	27%	+4%	32%	+4%	22%	–1%

Source: I. Crewe (1987) 'A new class of politics', *Guardian*, 15 June.

Divisions in the working class

As we discovered in an earlier section (see pp. 652–4), Crewe has believed for some time that the working class is divided. Labour has been losing support in the 'new working class' who live in the south of the country, own their own homes, are non-union members and work in the private sector. Crewe found that these divisions continued to be very important in 1987. For example, the Conservatives led Labour by 46 per cent to 26 per cent amongst the working class in the south of England, and by 44 per cent to 32 per cent amongst working-class homeowners. Crewe claims that the Labour Party:

> *had come to represent a declining segment of the working class – the traditional working class of the council estates, the public sector, industrial Scotland and the North ... It was a party neither of one class nor one nation, it was a regional class party.*
>
> Crewe, 1987a

Policy preference and voting

Crewe also examined the influence of policies on voting in 1987. On the surface he found little support for his belief that policy preference was becoming more important in shaping voters' behaviour. When asked to name the two issues that concerned them most, respondents were most likely to mention unemployment, followed by defence, the NHS and education. On all of these issues, except defence, Labour policies enjoyed more support than Conservative policies. Crewe says, 'Had electors voted solely on the main issues Labour would have won.'

Crewe therefore revised his earlier position that policy preference was crucially important in shaping voting. Instead, Crewe argued that voters attach more importance to their own prosperity than they do to issues that they identify as problems for society as a whole. He said, 'when answering a survey on the

important issues respondents think of public problems; when entering the polling booths they think of family fortunes'.

The Gallup survey found that 55 per cent believed that the Conservatives were more likely to produce prosperity than other parties; only 27 per cent thought they were less likely to do so. Furthermore, respondents were more likely to say that opportunities to get ahead, the general economic situation and their household's financial situation had improved, than they were to say the reverse. Thus Crewe believed that the main reason that the Conservatives won in 1987 was that people felt more prosperous and they trusted the Conservatives to deliver rising living standards.

Anthony Heath, John Curtice, Geoff Evans, Roger Jowell, Julia Field and Sharon Witherspoon – *Understanding Political Change 1964-87*

Heath *et al.* conducted the *British Election Study* into the 1987 election. Their findings were published in the book *Understanding Political Change* (Heath *et al.*, 1991). In it they examined how voting and voters had changed between 1964 and 1987. They discussed a number of influential ideas on voting and political change by using data from successive election studies. In doing so they challenged many of the ideas put forward by other psephologists. In particular they raised doubts about whether the social psychology had changed much at all. Society and politics might have changed, but Heath *et al.*'s findings suggested that the reasons why people voted in particular ways had not altered much over more than two decades.

Volatility and party identification

First, Heath *et al.* examined the proposition that voters had become more volatile and less willing to identify with a party and remain loyal to it. In 1964, 88 per cent of those questioned said they identified very or fairly strongly with a political party. By 1987 this had declined to 71 per cent. On the other hand, there was no clear trend in the percentage of respondents who thought of voting for another party during the campaign and who could not therefore be considered party loyalists. In 1964, 25 per cent of those asked thought of voting for another party; in 1983 the figure was the same, 25 per cent; and in 1987 it had increased only marginally to 28 per cent. Thus, while some figures suggested a small but significant decline in partisan alignment, other figures were more ambiguous.

The research reached more clearcut conclusions on electoral volatility. Between the 1959 and 1964 elections 18 per cent of those who voted in both elections changed who they voted for; between the 1983 and 1987 elections 19 per cent of those who voted in both changed their choice of party. Heath *et al.* used three different measures of volatility but obtained similar results for all of them. They said:

> *All three measures show much the same changes over time, the differences being rather modest and showing no clear trend towards increasing volatility. Volatility was at its highest on all three measures between 1970 and 1974, but since then it has fluctuated.*
>
> Heath, *et al.*, 1991

Policy preference, parents and voting

In examining the extent to which party preference influences voting, Heath *et al.* note that the strength of the relationship will be influenced by the degree to which the policies of parties differ. If, for example, Labour and Conservative have very different manifestos at an election, more people are likely to vote for a centre party such as the Liberals (now the Liberal Democrats), leaving Labour and Conservative supporters polarized in their views. If Labour and Conservatives put forward less distinct sets of proposals at an election, they are likely to pick up votes from centre parties, and the voters for the two main parties are likely to have less distinctive views.

Heath *et al.* compared the 1964 and 1979 elections to examine changes in the relationship between policy preference and voting, since the Liberals polled about the same proportion of the votes in those two elections and the perceived differences between Labour and the Conservatives were at a similar level in the two elections. They found that policies seemed to have had a considerable amount of influence on voting in the 1979 election. This appeared to be in line with the theory that voters were becoming more rational and were increasingly influenced by their policy preferences. However, Heath *et al.* also found that 'issues were rather important in 1964'. The different policies of Labour and the Conservatives on nuclear weapons and on privatization versus nationalization both exercised a considerable influence on voting in that year. Heath *et al.* conclude that 'voters were rational and sophisticated in the 1960s just as they are today'. Thus Heath *et al.* accept the importance of policy preference for voting but deny that this is anything new.

They also examined the influence of parents on voting, and again found that there seemed to be relatively little change from the 1960s. While there had been a small decline in the likelihood of children voting the same way as their parents, this could be

explained by an increase in social mobility which meant that children ended up in a different class from that of their parents. Where children remained in the same class there was no evidence that political socialization in childhood had become less important.

The findings of Heath *et al.* on party identification, volatility, policy preference and the influence of parents on voting represent a challenge to the view of Crewe and others that a major change in the factors influencing voting took place in the 1970s. Heath *et al.* found that a similar mix of factors influenced voting in the 1970s and 1980s as in the 1960s. The idea that a fundamental change had taken place was not supported by the evidence.

Class-based voting

As in their earlier study, Heath *et al.* discussed the view that class was becoming less closely related to voting. They distinguished between absolute and relative class voting. Absolute class voting measures the proportion of people voting for the class their party is commonly held to represent: in other words, the percentage of voters who are not 'deviant voters'. Table 9.11 is based on the five-class model used by Heath *et al.* in their earlier study, but with the working class and 'foremen' and technicians combined to form the working class, and the other three classes (petty bourgeoisie, routine non-manual workers and the salariat) combined to form the middle class.

Table 9.11 shows, and Heath *et al.* acknowledge, that absolute class voting has declined. However, it has declined rather less than it first appears if

Table 9.11 Absolute class voting, 1964–87

	Middle class Conservative plus working-class Labour as percentage of all voters	Middle-class Conservative or Liberal plus working-class Labour as percentage of all voters
1964	64.0	70.7
1966	64.4	69.9
1970	60.2	64.4
February 1974	55.5	66.5
October 1974	57.4	68.6
1979	56.7	64.3
1983	51.7	66.9
1987	51.6	66.3

Source: A. Heath *et al.* (1991) *Understanding Political Change* Pergamon Press, Oxford, p. 65.

Liberals and other centre parties are regarded as class-based parties representing the middle class. Heath *et al.* argue that it is legitimate to see them in this way since they draw a comfortable majority of their votes from middle-class voters. Thus, to Heath *et al.*, absolute class voting has declined, but not to the extent that psephologists such as Crewe have claimed.

On the other hand, Heath *et al.* are unwilling to concede that relative class voting has declined, at least since 1970. Using an odds ratio which compares the chances of the salariat voting Conservative with the chances of the working class voting Labour (this statistical measure is explained further on p. 656), they found that there was little change between the 1983 and 1987 elections. They therefore confirmed their earlier claim that there had been 'trendless fluctuations' in relative class voting, although this time they did say that these fluctuations had been typical only since 1970. They say, 'Looking ... at the Conservative:Labour log odds ratio, we see that this declined rapidly between 1964 and 1970. There is however no further decline after 1970.'

Heath *et al.* therefore modify their position from that expressed in the earlier work, *How Britain Votes*. They say that there has been a 'modest' decline in the relationship between class and voting, but much less than that claimed by many other commentators. However, one reason for this has simply been an increase in the number of candidates standing for centre parties. In 1964, 1966 and 1970 the Liberals contested only just over half the seats in the general elections. In later elections they, or other centre parties, have stood in nearly all constituencies. Simply by having a greater number of candidates they have attracted more votes away from the more clearly class-based parties, and thus they have weakened the apparent relationship between class and voting. Any change in the relationship has more to do with political changes than any alteration in the psychology of the electorate.

Divisions within classes

Heath *et al.* examine Crewe's claims that there is a 'new working class' and that new divisions have opened up in the middle class. They concede that housing tenure has a relationship with voting, but deny that this is anything new. According to their figures, living in a council house influenced people to vote Labour as much in 1964 as it did in 1987. Similarly, being an owner-occupier was just as likely to influence somebody to be a Conservative voter in 1964 as it was in 1987.

Union membership, or non-membership had some influence on voting, as did ethnicity (people from an ethnic minority were more likely to vote Labour), but

there was no evidence that the strength of either of these relationships had increased. Indeed, membership or non-membership of a trade union seemed to be becoming less of an influence on voting.

However, region had become more important. In 1964, region had little effect on working-class voting patterns, but in 1987 the working class living in the south were becoming proportionately more likely to vote Conservative, while those in the north, and in Wales and Scotland were becoming proportionately more inclined to vote Labour.

Heath *et al.* conclude that 'the working class is certainly fragmented' but, with the exception of regional differences, this fragmentation is nothing new.

Heath *et al.* found more evidence that there were new divisions in the middle class. In particular, they found that 'welfare and creative professionals' were increasingly inclined to vote Labour, while other members of the middle class were likely to remain loyal to the Conservatives. They also found that having had higher education was increasingly associated with non-Conservative voting in the middle class. Longer-established divisions in the middle class were based on religion (with members of the Church of England being more likely than others to vote Conservative) and social background (with middle-class people from working-class backgrounds more likely than others to vote Labour).

Overall, Heath *et al.* found that neither the middle class nor the working class were 'internally homogeneous', but this was nothing new and most of the divisions within the classes dated back at least as far as the 1960s.

'Pocket-book voting'

As we discussed earlier, another theory proposed by Crewe was that people voted according to their own economic interests: they voted for the party they thought would be best for their standard of living. Heath *et al.* examined this theory, calling it pocket-book voting.

They did find that people who had voted Conservative in 1983 were less likely to vote Conservative again in 1987 if they felt that their own standard of living, or the standard of living in the country as a whole, had fallen. However, Heath *et al.* questioned the theory that voting was directly related to living standards. People were much more likely to mention the government's general competence or incompetence as a reason for changing their vote than they were to mention standards of living. Furthermore, those who did mention their own standard of living were also very likely to mention the interests of the social class to which they belonged. This suggested that they tended to see their own self-interest as tied to the interests of their class as a whole. Heath *et al.* claim that 'pocket-book voting and class voting may not be rivals but rather may be different aspects of the same phenomenon'.

Conclusion

Heath *et al.* conclude that, between 1964 and 1987, voting was affected by social changes (such as the contraction of the working class) but there had been little change in the factors shaping voting. Class, non-class social factors, policy preferences and party images all had an influence and no one factor could explain voting in either 1964 or 1987. Many of the apparent changes were due either to social change or to political change, and not to changes in the motivation of voters. Many social factors had been working against the Labour Party, reducing the percentage of the population likely to vote for them. Other changes had benefited the Liberal Party and other centre parties. Politically, the success of the Liberals (and the SDP) had increased volatility and led to the apparent reduction in the importance of class. Part of this success, though, was simply due to the increased number of candidates these parties had put up at elections.

As in their study of the 1983 election. Heath *et al.* calculated the effects of changes on Labour's electoral prospects. Comparing 1964 and 1987, the effects of social changes plus the increased number of Liberal candidates and the extension of the franchise to those aged over 18 could be expected to have disadvantaged the Labour Party by 8.4 per cent, advantaged the Liberal/Alliance by 8.9 per cent, and made no overall difference to the Conservative vote. Obviously these changes made it difficult for Labour to win elections. Nevertheless, Labour did better in 1987 than it had done in 1983.

Criticisms of *Understanding Political Change*

In a review of *Understanding Political Change*, Ivor Crewe was rather less critical than he had been of Heath's earlier work in *How Britain Votes*. He even praised aspects of the book saying:

> *The technical accuracy and theoretical interest of what Heath* et al. *have to say about volatility, tactical voting and other supposed consequences of partisan alignment are for the most part unchallengeable. Analysis and interpretation are authoritative, sophisticated and almost painfully cautious.*
>
> Crewe, 1992

This more positive tone was hardly surprising since, as Crewe acknowledged, the conclusions of *Understanding Political Change* were rather closer to his own views than those of the earlier study. Crewe

said of the change in emphasis, 'Earlier confidence has given way to caution: the missionary's impatience with the old primitives has mellowed into the old cleric's self-doubt and scepticism.'

Crewe notes that Heath and his collaborators gave less weight to the political values of parties and voters than they had done earlier and put more emphasis on social and political changes. Nevertheless, Crewe recognized that there were still considerable differences between himself and Heath *et al.*, and he identifies a number of weak spots in their analysis:—

1 He argues that Heath *et al.* only take a very limited number of political changes into account. For example, while they analyse the extension of the vote to 18-20-year-olds and the expansion in the number of Liberal candidates, they take no account of things such as changes in party leaders, or the impact of the press and other media. They give no good reason for excluding some possible influences on voting while paying close attention to others.

2 They fail to consider the possibility that voting behaviour had shaped some of the factors they had analysed rather than the other way round. For example, the rise in the number of Liberal candidates could be seen as resulting from the great success enjoyed by Liberal candidates in by-elections between 1970 and 1974. Heath *et al.* may have got cause and effect the wrong way round. In other words, the rise in the number of candidates was caused by increased popularity and not vice versa.

3 Crewe continues to insist that the relationship between class and voting had become much less strong. He admits that measures of relative class voting give some indication of how ideologically distinctive classes are. Nevertheless, absolute measures are also important. For example, if Labour support fell to 25 per cent in the working class, but to 0 per cent in the middle class, this would show up as a strengthening of the class basis of voting in odds ratio tables. What this would fail to make clear was the fact that Labour could no longer be seen as the party of the working class since it was attracting just a quarter of their votes. To Crewe, then, absolute measures of class voting are vital for measuring the 'political cohesion of a single class'. According to Heath *et al.*'s own figures, Labour's share of the working-class vote fell from 68 per cent in 1964 to 48 per cent in 1984, and Crewe believes that such figures cannot but be taken to show that the working class lost some of its political solidarity.

The 1992 election

The results of the 1992 election are given in Table 9.12. They show that, although the Conservatives won the election, their vote dropped by 0.4 per cent, compared to the 1987 election. Labour's vote rose by 3.6 per cent and the Liberal Democrats lost 2.0 per cent of the vote, compared to the Alliance's share in 1987. The Conservatives were returned to office with an overall majority for the fourth successive time, having already held office for 13 years. Nevertheless, their overall majority was cut from 101 to 21, and Crewe calculates that, 'had a mere 1,702 people voted Labour rather than Conservative in the eleven most marginal Conservative seats, the government would have lost its overall majority' (Crewe, 1992).

On the surface, then, the decline of the Liberal Democrat vote seemed to firmly establish Labour as the only serious alternative to the Conservatives, and the small size of the Conservatives' overall majority seemed to give Labour grounds for optimism. However, many commentators interpreted the result quite differently. What the result meant for Labour, and for the future of British politics generally, was keenly debated.

Richard Rose – Labour's 'shattering' defeat

Labour's advantages

Richard Rose (1992) argues that the result of the 1992 election 'was shattering for Labour not only because it thought it was going to win but because, by all the old rules, it *should* have won'. From this point of view, Labour fought the election under very favourable conditions, yet it still ended up about 8 per cent behind the Conservatives. Rose identifies a number of factors which were working to increase the Labour vote in 1992:

1 Labour had been a relatively united party between 1987 and 1992, and the left wing, which had lost Labour votes in previous elections, no longer had much influence in the party.

2 The centre parties had been damaged by the arguments which surrounded the merger of the largest sections of the Liberal and Social Democratic Parties to form the Liberal Democrats. Labour therefore had a good opportunity to win votes from former Liberal and SDP voters.

Table 9.12 The 1992 general election

	Total number of votes	MPs elected	Share of UK vote (%)	Share of GB vote (%)
Conservative[a]	**14,049,508**	**336**	**41.8**	**42.8**
Change from 1987	+313,171	−39	−0.4	−0.4
Labour	**11,557,134**	**271**	**34.4**	**35.2**
Change from 1987	+1,527,190	+42	+3.6	+3.7
Liberal Democrat[b]	**5,998,446**	**20**	**17.8**	**18.3**
Change from 1987	−1,342,706	−2	−4.8	−4.8
Welsh/Scottish Nationalists[c]	**786,348**	**7**	**2.3**	**2.4**
Change from 1987	+245,886	+1	+0.6	+0.7
Others[d]	**433,870**	**0**	**1.3**	**1.3**
Change from 1987	+282,353	0	+0.8	+0.8
Northern Ireland parties[e]	**785,093**	**17**	**2.3**	–
Change from 1987	+54,941	0	+0.1	–
Total	**33,610,399**	**651**	**United Kingdom turnout**	**77.7**
Change from 1987	+1,080,835	+1	Change from 1987	+2.3

Notes:
a The figures for the Conservative Party exclude 11 candidates in Northern Ireland [illegible]
b The Liberal Democrats exclude 73 candidates standing for the 'Liberal Party' who polled [illegible] votes; they are compared with the Liberal/SDP Alliance in 1987.
c The figures for the Nationalists include 3 joint Plaid Cymru/Green candidates.
d The figures for 'others' [illegible] candidates and votes [illegible] Green candidates [illegible] votes), 73 Liberal Party candidates [illegible] votes), 300 candidates for the Natural Law Party [illegible] votes) and [illegible] other candidates who polled a total of [illegible] votes.
e The figures for Northern Ireland include *all* candidates and votes including Conservative (11 candidates), Natural Law (9), Workers (8) and others (8) as well as the Ulster Unionists, the Democratic Unionists, the Popular Unionists, the SDLP, Sinn Fein and the Alliance.

Source: I. Crewe (1992) 'Why did Labour lose (yet again)?', *Politics Review*, September, p. 2.

3 The 1992 election was held because the government had come to the end of its five-year term and was unable to put it off any longer. The conditions under which the Conservatives were forced to seek re-election were very far from ideal for them. In particular, 'The economy was in prolonged recession and unemployment had risen sharply in the South of England', which was the heartland of Tory support. If a sense of economic well-being helped governments to win elections, then the poor economic situation seemed likely to be a serious handicap to the Conservatives.

4 The Conservative election campaign was widely seen as lacking in inspiration. It seemed 'at times even defeatist', suggesting that the Conservatives themselves were far from confident of success. This was hardly surprising since the opinion polls consistently indicated that Labour would win.

5 The Conservative Party had 'experienced two leadership contests, first to remove Margaret Thatcher and then to choose the relatively unknown John Major as her successor'. The elections had exposed divisions within the Conservative Party and had resulted in their leader being much less experienced than the leader of the main opposition party, Neil Kinnock.

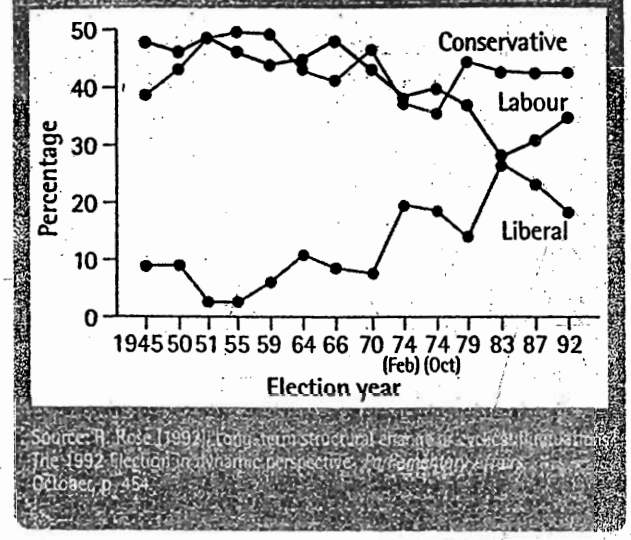
Taken together, these factors meant that Labour expected to win. The question, therefore, was why they failed to do so.

A structural realignment in electoral competition

Rose observes that 'Election outcomes can be influenced both by short-term actions of party leaders and long-term structural change.' In 1992 the short-term factors were in Labour's favour. However, according to Rose, the long-term structural factors had so undermined Labour's vote that they outweighed any advantages that Labour enjoyed.

Figure 9.4 shows trends in votes for the three main parties since the war. To Rose, this figure demonstrates that there has been a significant change since 1974. Before that date, Conservative and Labour shares of the vote had been fairly similar. From 1974 onwards, though, the Labour average declined, while the Conservative vote stayed at about

Figure 9.4 Share of vote by party, 1945-92



Source: R. Rose (1992), 'Long-term structural change in the British electorate: the 1992 election in dynamic perspective', *Parliamentary Affairs*, October, p. 454.

the same level. In the six general elections between February 1974 and 1992, the Conservative vote ranged between a low of 35.8 per cent in October 1974 and a high of 43.9 per cent in 1979. The Labour range was between a low of 27.6 per cent in 1983 and a high of 39.2 per cent in October 1974. Rose calculates that 'the mid point of the Conservative range is 6.4 per cent above that of Labour', and he notes that since 1979 the Conservative vote has usually been near the top of its range whilst the Labour vote has been near the bottom of its range. From these figures he concludes that there has been a structural realignment in electoral competition. Labour's 'normal vote', ignoring short-term influences, has fallen to 33-4 per cent, while the Conservative 'normal vote' has stayed as high as 40-1 per cent.

Structural changes

Rose identifies the following changes which, in his view, had led to Labour's long-term electoral decline:

1 Cities, which used to be Labour strongholds, have declined as population centres, leaving Labour with fewer urban constituencies where it can rely on winning.

2 In 1951, 28 per cent of people were homeowners. By 1992 this figure had risen to almost 75 per cent. Since homeowners are more likely to vote Conservative than council tenants, this has reduced the normal level of Labour support.

3 Standards of living have risen sharply since 1951. Gross Domestic Product per capita has gone up 139 per cent even after allowing for inflation. Many more people own a range of consumer goods which were the prerogative of a rich minority in 1951. The number of poor, who are traditionally Labour supporters, has fallen substantially.

4 Educational standards have also risen fast. Between 1950 and 1992 the proportion of young people staying on to receive tertiary education nearly tripled. There are fewer voters with a very poor education – another group which has traditionally been prone to voting Labour.

5 Perhaps more controversially, Rose also claims that:

> *Structural changes in British society since 1951 have replaced an old system of class relations with new divisions of life style and taste. In 1951 the distinction between cloth caps and bowler hats, the civilian equivalent of officers and other ranks, was marked in many ways from manners and accents to voting.*
>
> Rose, 1992

Without the old class system, Labour cannot rely on solid support from the working class. The working class is in any case shrinking, from over two-thirds of the electorate in the 1950s to under a half by the 1990s.

6 Trade union membership has declined. It fell by a quarter in the 1980s alone, and union members have always been more inclined to vote Labour than non-union members.

Together these changes have been steadily undermining Labour support, making it increasingly difficult for Labour to win elections.

Political problems for Labour

Writing in 1992, Rose believed that Labour's long-term problems could well be compounded by shorter-term political problems by the time of the next election:

1 The economy might well be in a better state than in 1992.

2 There was no guarantee that Labour would maintain party unity for a further five years, and any splits could have serious consequences in lost votes.

3 Labour could try for an electoral pact with the Liberal Democrats but, to Rose, political problems made such a pact 'impossible to conceive', at least until after the second general election of the 1990s. In any case, research suggested that voters who defected from the Liberals or Liberal Democrats were just as likely to change to voting Conservative as voting Labour.

4 In Scotland, Labour was very successful in 1992, but at a future election a number of its seats could come under threat if there was any further revival of support for the Scottish Nationalist Party.

Rose also points out that, despite Labour increasing its share of the vote in 1987 and again in 1992, it still had a mountain to climb. Even if Labour gained a further 3.4 per cent of the vote in the next election (its average increase in the previous two), it would still poll fewer votes than the Conservatives.

Rose does say that it was not inevitable that the Conservatives would win the next election, but he also says, 'the hope for a Labour majority in Parliament in 1996 can be described as "Micawberism run mad", a passive hope that someday something will turn up'. He implies that if Labour could not win in 1992, when nearly all the short-term factors favoured the party, then its future prospects were dismal.

Conclusion

Rose's analysis is not particularly sophisticated and not backed up by his own detailed empirical research. Nevertheless, his case appeared quite convincing and he was not alone in suggesting that Labour was in trouble. Most other psephologists, though, did not go quite as far as him in writing off Labour's future chances.

Ivor Crewe – the 1992 election

A devastating setback for Labour

Ivor Crewe (1992) reaches broadly similar conclusions to Rose about the performance of the parties in the 1992 election. According to Crewe, the election was not a total success for the Conservatives even though they won their fourth consecutive election. It was the lowest share of the vote with which the Conservatives had won an election since 1922 and, with a 2 per cent swing in its favour, 'Labour came very close to toppling the Conservative government.' Nevertheless, the election was a 'devastating setback for the Labour party'. It was its third worst percentage vote since the Second World War (with only the 1983 and 1987 elections being worse) and, despite its gains, it still ended up 7.4 per cent behind the Conservatives.

Like Rose, Crewe argues that factors were working very much in Labour's favour. He identifies the following reasons why Labour might have been expected to win:

1 Unlike the previous two elections, the 1992 election was fought during a recession, which harmed the electoral chances of the government. Labour did not have the problem of being blamed for widespread strikes (as it had as a result of the 'Winter of Discontent' in 1978-9); it did not have the problem of 'left wing extremism and weak leadership' (as it did in 1983); and it did not have an unpopular unilateral nuclear disarmament policy (as it did in 1987). The government had to contend with adverse publicity about 'unemployment, bankruptcies and house repossessions', all of which 'soared throughout 1992'.
2 In the early 1980s most Tory policies had been fairly popular, but by 1992 the Conservatives had implemented a number of very unpopular measures. The 'poll tax' became 'the worst policy disaster of any post-war government' and the government was eventually forced into replacing it. The government's economic policy 'was almost as great a shambles' and 'educational and health reforms were too long delayed for their claimed benefits to make an impact by election day'.
3 The Labour Party had transformed itself into a 'united disciplined, moderate and modern' party, while its main competitor for anti-Conservative votes, the Liberal/SDP Alliance, had lost support because of difficulties over merging to become the Liberal Democrats.
4 The Labour Party managed to get 'caring' issues such as health, education and unemployment to the top of the agenda during the election campaign, and it was on these issues that it enjoyed the most favourable image with the electorate.

Like Rose, Crewe concludes that Labour should have won, and he identifies the key question about the election as 'Why did Labour lose yet again?'

Class and voting

One possible reason for Labour losing could have been continuing class dealignment, resulting in a further erosion of working-class support.

Table 9.13 shows the patterns of class voting in 1992 and the changes from the preceding two elections, according to opinion poll evidence. The figures show that Labour enjoyed the biggest swing in 1992, compared to 1987, amongst professional and managerial workers. But it also regained a considerable number of working-class votes, with a 4.5 per cent swing, compared to an overall swing of about 2 per cent. Crewe admits, therefore, that 'by conventional definitions class voting slightly increased'. The proportions voting for their traditional classes went up: 47 per cent of those voting being working-class Labour voters or middle-class Conservative voters, compared to 44 per cent in 1987.

Furthermore, the split between the 'traditional' and 'new' working class became less apparent. As Table 9.14 shows, the Conservative lead over Labour amongst the working class in the south was cut from 18 to 2 per cent; a 12 per cent Conservative lead amongst working-class owner-occupiers became a 1 per cent Labour lead; and amongst working-class non-union members Labour also regained the lead from the Conservatives.

Although Crewe argues that 'the rise in class voting should not be exaggerated' – since under half of those voting still cast their vote along class lines – the election provided little support for theories of class dealignment. Labour voting did increase in the middle class, weakening the relationship between class and voting in that class; but, in the working

Table 9.13 Class voting in 1992

	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Con lead over Lab	Swing to Lab
Professional/ managerial (ABs)					
Vote in 1992	55	23	22	+32	+5.5
Change from 1987	-1	+10	-9	-11	
Change from 1979	-9	+2	+6	-11	+5.5
Office/clerical (C1s)					
Vote in 1992	50	29	21	+21	+1.0
Change from 1987	+2	+4	-6	-2	
Change from 1979	-4	-1	+5	-3	+1.5
Skilled manual (C2s)					
Vote in 1992	41	40	19	+1	+3.0
Change from 1987	-2	+4	-2	-6	
Change from 1979	0	-4	+4	+2	-2.0
Semi-skilled/unskilled manual (DEs)					
Vote in 1992	31	55	14	-24	+4.5
Change from 1987	-1	+8	-7	-9	
Change from 1979	-3	+2	+1	-5	+2.5
Unemployed					
Vote in 1992	27	56	17	-29	+0.5
Change from 1987	+1	+2	-4	-1	
Change from 1979	-13	+7	+6	-20	+10.0

Source: I. Crewe (1992) 'Why did Labour lose (yet again)?' *Politics Review*, September, p. 5.

class, traditional patterns of voting returned to some extent. Labour's defeat could not therefore be put down to a loss of support in the working class.

Issues and voting

Crewe's figures also suggest that issues may not have influenced the election result to the extent that would be expected by policy preference theories of voting. As in his analysis of the 1987 election, Crewe found that Labour policies tended to be more popular on the issues which people said were most important to them. When asked to select two issues, health, unemployment and education were the most frequently mentioned by opinion poll respondents. On all of them Labour enjoyed a healthy lead over the Conservatives.

Defence – which had been mentioned as one of the two most important issues by 35 per cent in 1987 – was mentioned by only 3 per cent in 1992. Conservative policies on defence were much more popular than Labour's, and the decline in the importance of defence to the electorate must have benefited Labour.

The economy and economic well-being

The economy did not appear to be a particularly important issue for most voters. Only 11 per cent mentioned prices as one of the two most important issues and 10 per cent mentioned taxation. However, as Crewe had observed about the 1987 election, what people say is important to them when asked by opinion pollsters may not be the same as what actually influences them when they come to vote. A feeling of economic well-being may be crucial to governments seeking re-election.

Table 9.14 Working-class voting in 1992

	The new working class				The traditional working class			
	Lives in South	Owner occupier	Non-union member	Works in private sector	Lives in Scotland or North	Council tenant	Union member	Works in public sector
Conservative	40	40	37	32	26	22	29	36
Labour	38	41	46	50	59	64	55	48
Liberal Democrat	23	19	17	18	15	13	16	16
Con or Lab majority	Con	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab
in 1992	+2	+1	+9	+18	+33	+42	+26	+12
Con or Lab majority	Con	Con	Con	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab
in 1987	+18	+12	+2	+1	+28	+32	+18	+17
Swing to Labour 1987–92	+ 8.0	+ 6.5	+ 5.5	+ 8.5	+ 2.5	+ 5.0	+ 4.0	– 2.5 (to Con)

Source: Gallup/BBC survey (10–11 June 1987); Gallup post-election survey (10–11 April 1992).

However, at first sight even this explanation does not seem to account for Labour's surprising failure: 30 per cent of respondents believed that their living standards had fallen during the preceding year, and only 25 per cent thought they had improved.

Nevertheless, Crewe believes that voters' perceptions about the comparative abilities of Labour and the Conservatives to deliver economic prosperity played a crucial part in determining the result. If people did not feel that the Conservatives were making them better off (as they did in 1987), they did feel that they would be worse off under Labour. In general they blamed economic problems on world recession or on Mrs Thatcher, rather than John Major who had replaced her as Conservative leader. Many feared the economic effects of electing a Labour government even though they thought Labour had better policies on most non-economic issues. In an exit poll (conducted on voters leaving the polling station), 53 per cent thought the Conservatives were the party most likely to take the right decisions on the economy, whereas only 35 per cent saw Labour as the best party in this respect.

With one exception, the opinion polls leading up to the election predicted that Labour would get a bigger share of the vote than the Conservatives. Even the exit polls considerably underestimated the margin of Conservative victory. In part, these inaccuracies may have been due to the limitations of the opinion polls themselves, but there was also evidence of a late swing from Labour to the Conservatives. Amongst those who changed their mind at the last minute, income tax, the economy, prices and interest rates were much more likely to be seen as important than they were by other voters. During the campaign the Conservatives attacked Labour, claiming that if a Labour government were elected it would result in a 'double whammy' of more taxes and higher prices. The evidence suggests that this part of the Conservative campaign had some success in spreading fear of the financial consequences of a Labour government, causing a last-minute switch which contributed to Labour's defeat.

Other factors

As well as concern about Labour's competence to run the economy, Crewe identifies a number of other factors that may have contributed to the result:

1 Public perceptions of the leadership qualities of the Conservatives' John Major and Labour's Neil Kinnock may have been important. One poll found that 52 per cent thought Major would make the better leader, compared to 23 per cent who named Kinnock. To Crewe, 'Kinnock was a serious electoral liability'.

2 Despite the widespread view that Labour managed its campaign better, it was the Conservatives who gained support during the run-up to the election. Across a whole range of issues Conservative policies gained in popularity as the campaign progressed. Crewe suggests that the electorate either developed a view that the Conservatives had more 'general governing competence than Labour' or it feared that Labour might be incompetent.

3 A third factor which was cited by many as influencing the outcome was the coverage of the election by the press. Most papers supported the Conservatives and some were particularly strong in doing so. On election day the *Sun* published a front-page picture of Neil Kinnock's head superimposed on a light-bulb with the headline, 'If Kinnock wins today will the last person to leave Britain please turn out the lights.' Some people argued (including the *Sun* itself) that this was crucial in persuading a number of *Sun* readers in marginal constituencies to change their minds at the last minute and vote Conservative, and therefore allow the Conservatives to retain a slender overall majority.

   Crewe finds some support for this view. Amongst *Sun* readers there was a big swing of 7.5 per cent to the Conservatives at the last minute. However, this was unlikely to have saved any more than six seats. Its effects should not be exaggerated because there was also a big swing amongst readers of the non-aligned *Independent* (7 per cent) and a rather small swing (2.5 per cent) amongst readers of the strongly pro-Tory *Daily Express*. Although the press did make a difference, it was not a decisive one.

Conclusion

Although Crewe saw the election as a 'devastating setback' for Labour, since it had lost despite fighting the election 'in as ideal conditions as an opposition could hope to find', his findings were not quite as pessimistic about Labour's prospects as Rose's. Crewe believed that the Conservatives might well have lost their overall majority if the opinion polls had not misleadingly shown Labour to be ahead. Fear of a Labour government (rather than great enthusiasm for a Tory government) 'galvanised Conservative support'. There was a high turn-out amongst Conservative supporters, and waverers who were considering voting for the Liberal Democrats returned to the Conservative fold to avoid a Labour victory.

Nevertheless, Labour did not deprive the Conservatives of an overall majority, despite the conditions under which the election was fought, a result which scarcely suggested that Labour could be confident of its future electoral prospects.

Heath, Jowell and Curtice – 'Can Labour win?'

Heath, Jowell and Curtice (1994) were involved in conducting the *British Election Study* for the 1992 election, as they had been in 1983 and 1987. They

carried out two surveys on the 1992 election. One was a cross-section survey in which a sample of voters were interviewed in the week following the election. The second was a panel survey in which respondents interviewed in 1987 were re-interviewed in 1992. The second survey excluded voters who were too young to vote in 1987, but panel surveys provide a better indication than other types of survey as to why people change their votes from election to election. (Panel surveys are a type of longitudinal study – this kind of research is discussed in Chapter 14.)

The size of Labour's task

Like Richard Rose and Ivor Crewe, Heath *et al.* start their analysis by noting that Labour lost despite factors operating in its favour, such as the recession, the unpopularity of the poll tax, the weakness of the Liberal Democrats, the merits of the Labour campaign and the greater popularity of its policies compared to 1987. They say, '1992 seemed to be Labour's best chance of victory since 1974. But the party still lost with nearly eight points less of the popular vote than the Conservatives.'

Nevertheless, Heath *et al.* believed that the 1992 election did offer some hope to Labour supporters. They argued that, in order to deprive the Conservatives of an outright victory in the next election, Labour would need a swing of just 0.5 per cent in its favour. On the other hand, it would need a 4.1 per cent swing to win an overall majority. This would be a higher swing than Labour had achieved in any election since 1945.

In Labour's favour was the need to win a smaller share of the vote than the Conservatives in order to win an overall majority. Labour tends to be stronger in seats with a smaller electorate so it could win more seats than the Conservatives for the same number of votes. To win outright on the current constituencies, Labour would need to be just over 0.5 per cent ahead of the Conservatives, whereas the Conservatives would need to be more than 6.5 per cent ahead of Labour to gain an overall majority.

Heath *et al.* point out that one problem for Labour was that boundary changes were due to take place before the next election. If votes were cast as they had been in 1992, these would be likely to give the Conservatives around 12 extra seats while depriving Labour of 5 seats. On the other hand, Labour stood to gain more than the Conservatives from any revival in Liberal Democrat fortunes, since the latter were challenging the Conservatives in far more constituencies than they were challenging Labour.

Heath *et al.* therefore argued that there was 'a mountain Labour has to climb' to win an overall majority, but the 'lower slopes are rather gentler'. Depriving the Conservatives of an overall majority would be relatively easy for Labour if it could continue to progress from its 1992 position. However, as Heath *et al.* noted earlier, Labour did fight the 1992 election under very favourable conditions, making it seem unlikely that it could do even better in the future.

In order to explore future prospects in more depth, Heath et al. went on to consider different theories of voting and their relevance for the different parties.

Volatility

Heath *et al.* comment that the likelihood of a big swing to Labour would be greater if the electorate were becoming more volatile. However, they found little evidence that this was happening. According to their findings, 22 per cent of people changed how they voted between 1987 and 1992, a slight increase on the 19 per cent who changed between 1983 and 1987. Nevertheless, this was still lower than the 24 per cent who changed the way they voted between the 1970 and February 1974 elections.

Social change and Labour's chances

Heath *et al.* agree with commentators like Rose that Labour is handicapped by social changes which undermine Labour's electoral base. According to their figures, the declining size of the working class could have been expected to cost Labour a 6 per cent share of the vote between 1964 and 1992.

As with volatility, though, the theory of class dealignment could be seen as giving Labour some hope. If voters are becoming less and less influenced by class when deciding which party to support, then a decline in the size of the working class need not be a major disadvantage for Labour. As in their earlier work, though, Heath *et al.* are generally critical of theories of class dealignment. Their figures suggest that there was no change in the amount of relative class voting, comparing the working class and salariat between the 1987 and 1992 elections. (For a definition of relative class voting, see p. 660.) They therefore 'conclude that class remains important, and that the declining size of the working class is indeed an important long-term problem for Labour'.

There are some social changes which have benefited Labour, including the increasing size of the ethnic-minority electorate and an increase in those receiving higher education (both groups are more likely to vote Labour), and a decline in the number of regular church-goers (who tend to vote Conservative). Overall, though, Labour's prospects have certainly been harmed by social changes.

Social attitudes

Table 9.15 details the proportions of people agreeing with a number of statements about government policy. According to Heath *et al.*, it shows that:

> *on the face of it, the electorate was more left-of-centre on a number of key issues (though not all) at the time of the 1992 general election than they had been at the time of Labour's last election victory in 1974.*
>
> Heath, Jowell and Curtice, 1994

For example, more people favoured spending money to get rid of poverty, putting money into the NHS, and giving workers more say at their places of work. Nearly as many people favoured the redistribution of wealth to working people in 1992 (48 per cent) as had done in 1974 (54 per cent). Heath *et al.* thought that some of the apparent shift to the left might be illusory and result from 'people's perceptions that the status quo had shifted to the right'.

Nevertheless, to the extent that voting is influenced by attitudes to issues, Labour could draw some comfort. There was little evidence that Labour's ideological position was becoming more unpopular or unacceptable to the electorate.

Party identification and political factors

If policies were not a major problem for Labour, trends in party identification were. Table 9.16 shows that identification with the Conservatives and Liberals was at a similar level in 1964 and 1992. On the other hand, Labour appeared to lose the loyalty of many of its supporters in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and it had failed to win them back. To Heath *et al.*, the sudden change in Labour Party identification was so swift that it could not have resulted from long-term social trends. Rather it was a consequence of short-term political failure by the Labour Party. The 'Winter of Discontent', the formation of the SDP and disagreements over nuclear weapons within the party 'not only cost the party votes in the short-term but also broke the long-term bond that formerly linked them to the party'.

Labour's prospects

Although not denying the enormous task Labour faced in trying to gain an overall majority in a future election, Heath *et al.* saw Labour as having more chance of success than either Richard Rose or Ivor Crewe did. From their analysis it appeared to be crucial that Labour should persuade more people to identify with the party.

Writing in 1994, Heath *et al.* found evidence that this might be happening:

1 John Major's standing in the opinion polls had declined to make him the 'most unpopular Prime Minister for the longest period in opinion poll records', and Labour's then leader, John Smith, was much more popular than his predecessor Neil Kinnock had been.

Table 9.15 Long-term trends in attitudes

	October 1974	1979	1987	1992
Percentage agreeing that the government should ...				
Redistribute income and wealth to ordinary working people	54	52	50	48
Spend more money to get rid of poverty	84	80	86	93
Nationalize more companies	30	16	16	24
Privatize more companies	20	38	31	23
Not introduce stricter laws to regulate trade unions	–	16	33	40
Give workers more say in running places where they work	58	55	76	79
Put more money into the NHS	84	87	90	93
Percentage agreeing that ...				
Welfare benefits have not gone too far	22	17	34	46

Source: A. Heath, R. Jowell and J. Curtice (1994) 'Labour's last chance?' in Heath *et al.* (eds) *Labour's Last Chance? The 1992 Election and Beyond*, Dartmouth Publishing, Aldershot, p. 285.

Table 9.16 Trends in party identification

	Conservative %	Labour %	Liberal %	None %
1964	41	42	12	5
1966	39	45	10	5
1970	42	42	8	7
February 1974	38	39	14	6
October 1974	36	39	15	7
1979	39	38	12	9
1983	37	31	19	11
1987	39	32	17	11
1992	42	34	13	8

Notes:
Liberal represents Liberal 1964–79, Liberal, SDP or Alliance 1983–87, Liberal Democrat 1992.
The figures are adjusted to take account of the sampling variation in the survey estimates. They do not sum to 100% because of 'other' parties.
Non-voters excluded.

Source: A. Heath, R. Jowell and J. Curtice (1994) 'Labour's last chance?' in Heath *et al.* (eds) *Labour's Last Chance? The 1992 Election and Beyond*, Dartmouth Publishing, Aldershot, p. 287.

2 The Conservatives had damaged their image as a result of splits within the party over Britain's relationship with the EC.
3 In September 1992 the actions of currency speculators had forced Britain to withdraw from the Exchange Rate Mechanism (which was supposed to protect the exchange rate of the pound).
4 A number of ministers were forced to resign or were dismissed between 1992 and 1994 as a consequence of 'either sexual scandals or failures in office'.
5 Perhaps most damaging of all, the Conservatives undermined their image as a low tax party by raising a number of taxes and by imposing VAT on domestic fuel.

Opinion poll evidence suggested that the Conservatives were losing support. One poll in 1993 found that only 33 per cent of people believed that the government was competent; and a succession of polls put Labour over 10 per cent ahead of the Conservatives. Furthermore, over four polls in 1993, Gallup found that on average only 30 per cent of the electorate identified with the Conservatives while 36 per cent identified with Labour.

Heath *et al.* remind readers that Labour enjoyed a big lead in most of the opinion polls before the 1992 election, but it still lost. They also say that 'we would expect mid-term disaffection from a governing party to dissipate somewhat and be replaced by a "homing tendency" at the following general election'. The Conservatives could expect to regain much of their support by the time voters actually got the chance to choose a new government. However, Heath *et al.* also raise the possibility that a major change could be taking place in British politics. They say:

> *It is at least plausible that the period since 1992 may have inflicted long term damage to the public's image of and affection for the Conservative Party of the kind inflicted on Labour some ten to fifteen years earlier.*
>
> Heath, Jowell and Curtice, 1994

If that were the case, the Conservative and Labour parties might return to being fairly evenly matched in their quest for election victories.

The 1997 general election

The election result

The result of the 1997 general election certainly gave psephologists food for thought. It appeared to offer strong confirmation of some theories, while making others seem completely implausible. In particular, it appeared to make a nonsense of the claims of some psephologists (such as David Rose) that, after the 1992 result, Labour had an almost impossible task to win an overall majority. David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh comment that 'The result was all the more striking, considering the many analyses in the immediate aftermath of the 1992 election that Labour faced too high a mountain to climb' (Butler and Kavanagh, 1997). The implications for some theories, though, were not so clearcut.

The results of the election are given in Table 9.17.

Table 9.17 The results of the 1997 general election

Party (% in UK)	Share of vote	Change	Number of seats	Change
Conservative	31.4	−11.4	165	−178
Labour	44.4	+9.2	419	+145
Lib Dem	17.2	−1.1	46	+28
Others	7.0	+3.3	11	+5

Note: Change in the number of seats won takes no account of the notional number of seats that each party would have won in 1992 had the new constituency boundaries been in operation. The Speaker is counted as a Labour MP although she was not opposed by the other major parties.

Source: D. Denver (1997) 'The results: how Britain voted' in A. Geddes and J. Tonge (eds) *Labour's Landslide*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.

The results marked a considerable change from previous elections. As David Denver says, 'By any standards the result was dramatic' (Denver, 1997a). Some of its most dramatic characteristics have been pointed out by Denver and others:

1 Labour won its first general election victory for some 23 years, with its highest share of the vote since 1966. It won an overall majority in the Commons of 179 – their biggest ever overall majority. (The previous best was 146 in 1945.) It was the biggest majority for any government since 1935. Labour won 'many seats that would normally have been considered as certain Conservative wins' (Denver, 1997a). As Table 9.17 shows, there was a massive swing to the Labour Party (9.2 per cent) and an even larger swing away from the Conservatives (-11.4 per cent). According to Denver, the swing from Conservative to Labour was 10.3 per cent – the biggest swing between the two since the Second World War.
2 The Conservative Party suffered a very bad defeat. Andrew Geddes and Jonathon Tonge (1997) point out that the Conservatives got their lowest share of the vote since 1832. David Denver (1997a) notes that seven cabinet ministers lost their seats, the Conservatives lost over half their seats overall, and they won no seats in Wales or Scotland. Although they got a higher share of the vote than the Labour Party had managed in their worst post-war

performance (28 per cent in 1983), the scale of the change in fortunes from one election to another was certainly the biggest in post-war history.

3 There was no dramatic change in the fortunes of the third party (the Liberal Democrats) in terms of the share of the vote. However, there was a big increase in the number of seats they won. They increased their number of MPs from 18 to 46, with an increase in their share of the vote of less than 1 per cent. This was almost certainly due to a big increase in tactical voting. Considerable numbers appeared to vote for someone other than their first-choice candidate in order to defeat a Conservative candidate (see below). It was also a successful election for minor parties and independent candidates. The share of the vote gained by 'others' increased by 3.3 per cent to 7 per cent. The independent 'anti-sleaze' candidate Martin Bell defeated the Conservative Neil Hamilton in what was considered a very safe Conservative seat. David Denver notes that Martin Bell became the first candidate without links to a political party to be elected an MP in a general election since 1945. A new party, the Referendum Party (which was opposed to Britain joining a single European currency and was led by the businessman James Goldsmith), won 2.7 per cent of the vote.

The limits to the landslide

However, it is possible to exaggerate the novel features of the 1997 election. In particular, the scale of Labour's victory in terms of their overall majority was disproportionate to the scale of their success in terms of votes cast. Andrew Geddes and Jonathan Tonge (1997) note that the number of seats won by Labour was partly a product of the first-past-the-post voting system. In this system the candidate with the most votes in each constituency wins the seat, and the votes cast for losing candidates effectively count for nothing. The system tends to favour the most successful parties and makes it very difficult for minor parties to win seats unless their support is concentrated in specific areas of the country (as is the case with the Scottish Nationalist Party, for example).

Labour won 63 per cent of the seats with 44 per cent of the votes cast. Geddes and Tonge calculate that 'Under a strictly proportional system, Labour would have been denied an overall majority, possessed 128 fewer MPs and been confronted by thirty-nine extra Conservative and sixty-six Liberal Democrat MPs.'

John Curtice and Michael Steed observe that Labour's share of the vote was lower than any it achieved between 1945 and 1966, including three elections it lost during that period. Furthermore, the turnout was, at 71.2 per cent, the lowest since the war. Less than a third of the electorate (30.9 per cent) actually voted for the Labour Party.

Overall, then, it was the swing from the Conservatives to Labour that was the most notable feature of the election rather than the proportion of votes that the Labour Party gained.

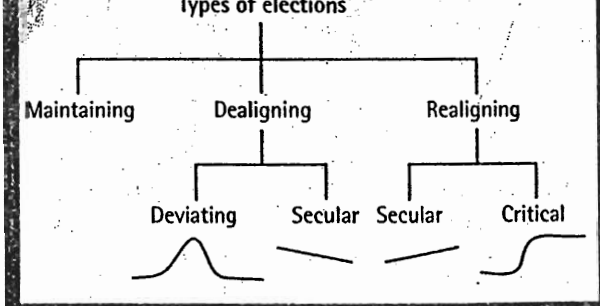
The *British Election Study* of 1997

The significance of the 1997 general election was the focus of the book *Critical Elections* which was based on the *British Election Study* (Evans and Norris (eds), 1999). The 1997 *British Election Study* was the eleventh in a series of studies dating back to 1964. The 1997 study used a sample of 2,733 in England and Wales and 882 in Scotland. A number of psephologists used data from the 11 studies to evaluate whether 1997 represented a radical break from previous elections. All based their articles upon a framework for analysing elections outlined by Pippa Norris and Geoffrey Evans (1999a).

Pippa Norris and Geoffrey Evans – 'Understanding electoral change'

Pippa Norris and Geoffrey Evans argue that it is possible to distinguish between three main types of elections: maintaining elections, dealigning elections and realigning elections. Dealigning elections can be subdivided into two types, deviating and secular; whilst realigning elections can also be divided into two types, secular and critical (see Figure 9.5).

Figure 9.5 Analytical typology of elections



Source: P. Norris and G. Evans (1999) 'Introduction: understanding electoral change', in G. Evans and P. Norris (eds) *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective*, Sage, London, p. xxvii.

1 Maintaining elections are elections in which no major changes take place in the nature of voting, in the nature of the competing parties or in the issues which are of key importance in politics. There may be small shifts in the share of votes gained by each party but these are due to short-term political factors rather than long-term trends or fundamental changes. Thus, while the governing party might change, the fundamental character of politics does not.

   Norris and Evans comment that the big swing from Conservative to Labour in 1997 makes it implausible that 1997 could be seen as a maintaining election.

2 Dealigning elections take place when 'the social psychological bonds linking parties and voters loosen' (Norris and Evans, 1999a). These are of two types:

   Deviating elections result when 'particular personalities, issues or events produce a temporary sharp reversal in the "normal" share of the vote for major parties'. They often contain strong protest votes against a party in power and can involve a sudden surge in support for minor parties. One example was the 1989 European elections, when the Green Party achieved a much higher share of the vote in Britain than it has received before or since. Deviating elections do not signal a long-term change except in as much as they show that the electorate has become more volatile. Short-term political factors have most influence on the outcome.

   Norris and Evans say that:

   > *The 1997 election can be most plausibly regarded as a deviating election if it is interpreted primarily as an expression of negative protest against the 18 years of Conservative rule, prompted by the pervasive problems of sexual and financial sleaze, internal leadership splits and the sense of economic mismanagement which afflicted the Major administration after the 'Black Wednesday' ERM debacle.*
   >
   > Norris and Evans, 1999a, p. xxix

   (For details about 'Black Wednesday', see pp. 618–19.) If this analysis was correct, then the Labour Party could expect electoral difficulties in the future once the Conservatives had sorted out their problems.

   Secular dealignment describes elections which involve a 'long term, incremental and cumulative progressive weakening in party-voter bonds'. Such elections may involve a long-term process of class dealignment, where voters cease to automatically support a party which they believe represents their class interests. Bo Sarlvick and Ivor Crewe argued in 1983 that there had been a 'decade of dealignment' in British politics (see pp. 652–4), and they therefore saw elections in the 1970s and 1980s as involving secular dealignment.

   If the 1997 election could be seen in these terms, then Labour's victory would be a product of continuing trends. They were able to win because of the gradual erosion of loyal support for both parties. However, like a victory based upon a deviating election, one victory, however big, would not guarantee future success. A volatile and fickle electorate with few loyalties could as easily turn against the Labour Party as it had against the Conservatives in 1997.

3 Realigning elections involve evolutionary or revolutionary change in the social and psychological bonds between voters and parties. In such elections a significant part of the electorate begin to identify with particular parties, when they did not do so before.

   Secular realignment is characterized by 'an evolutionary and cumulative *strengthening* in party support over a series of elections'. From this viewpoint, Labour's 1997 victory was a case of 'one more heave'. They had picked up support in the 1987 and 1992 elections and this process continued in 1997 as they had further improved their appeal to the electorate. Norris and Evans say that 'Such an interpretation would rest on broadened Labour support for non-traditional constituencies for the parties, such as among women or younger voters, due to the process of value change in the British electorate.'

   Critical elections involve the biggest changes of all. They are *'those exceptional contests which produce abrupt, significant and durable realignments in the electorate with major consequences for the long-term party order'*. They affect the agendas of several governments and not just the one elected in the critical election. Critical elections have three related features:

   i. There is some realignment in the 'ideological basis of party competition'. Issues which were not important in previous elections might become central to the political agenda. Alternatively, one or more parties might shift their ideological position so much that they 'leapfrog' over other parties. Thus, for example, a traditionally left-wing party might move so far that they become more right-wing than a party of the ideological centre. Another alternative is that a new party with significant support might become established for the first time.

   ii. There will be 'some realignments in the social basis of party support'. For example, particular classes, ethnic groups or regions will change from predominantly supporting one party to supporting another.

   iii. Finally, there will be 'realignments in the partisan loyalties of voters'. Large numbers of people become loyal to a party for the first time or shift their loyalty from one party to another.

There are a number of ways in which the 1997 election could be interpreted as a critical election which changed the face of British politics. It could be argued that the election saw a major shift to the right by the Labour Party, with the consequence of widening its social appeal to members of the middle class and gaining many new partisan supporters. Britain's role in the European Union emerged as an important issue while other issues declined in importance. For example, defence policies became less controversial with the end of the cold war between Russia (and previously the Soviet Union) and the West.

In their introductory chapter, Norris and Evans reserved judgement about whether 1997 was a critical election or not. We will now review the findings of the other social scientists who examined data from the *British Election Study* of 1997, before returning to the conclusions reached by Norris and Evans.

Ian Budge – changes in party policy and ideology

The first issue examined by one of the researchers was the question of how far the Labour Party had changed its policies and ideology. Ian Budge (1999) examined the major policy positions of the Labour Party, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats (previously the Liberals and the Liberal/Social Democrat Alliance) in every election since 1945. Each sentence in the manifestos was analysed in terms of whether it adopted a left-wing or a right-wing stance. Budge then calculated whether, overall, the manifesto had a preponderance of left-wing or right-wing policies. Table 9.18 gives some indication of the sorts of policies that were judged to be left-wing or right-wing. Figure 9.6 charts the findings of the study.

Table 9.18 shows some significant movements in party ideology. Between 1992 and 1997 the Labour Party manifesto moved sharply to the right, so that for the first time in post-war history there were more right-wing than left-wing policies. Furthermore, Labour had leapfrogged over the Liberal Democrats, so that Labour's manifesto was the more right-wing.

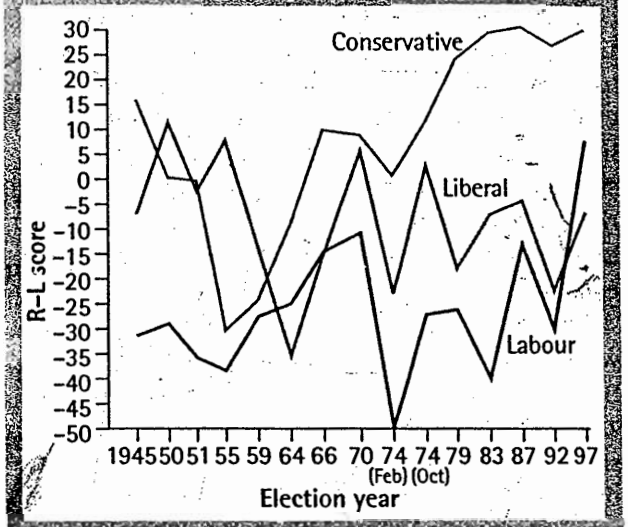
However, Budge did not conclude that these changes were necessarily indicative of a critical election. The Liberal Democrats held their position on the centre-left, and the 'Conservatives kept, broadly speaking, their Thatcherite right-wing posture'. The Labour Party certainly changed its stance, but it deviated 'only from their leftward shift of position in 1992'. Having temporarily shifted to more left-wing policies in the previous election, Labour continued its general move to the right which had begun in 1983.

Table 9.18 Budge's left–right coding scale

Codings of manifesto sentences	
Right emphases (Sum of %s for)	Minus Left emphases (Sum of %s for)
Pro-military	Decolonization
Freedom, human rights	Anti-military
Constitutionalism	Peace
Effective authority	Internationalism
Free enterprise	Democracy
Economic incentives	Regulate capitalism
Anti-protectionism	Economic planning
Economic orthodoxy	Pro-protectionism
Social services limitation	Controlled economy
National way of life	Nationalization
Traditional morality	Social services expansion
Law and order	Education expansion
Social harmony	Pro-labour

Source: I. Budge, 'Party policy and ideology: reversing the 1950s?' in G. Evans and P. Norris (eds), *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective*, Sage, London, p. 1.

Figure 9.6 British parties' ideological movement on left–right scale, 1945–97



Source: H.-D. Klingemann *et al.* (1994) *Parties, Policies and Democracy*, Westview Press, Boulder, quoted in I. Budge, 'Party policy and ideology: reversing the 1950s?' in G. Evans and P. Norris (eds), (1999) *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective*, Sage, London, p. 1.

Budge does not believe that this change will necessarily be permanent. Having established a stronger electoral position, the Labour Party might well move back towards more left-wing policies,

perhaps with a renewed emphasis on welfare spending. Budge therefore believes that 1997 can best be interpreted as a deviating election rather than a critical one, at least in terms of party ideology.

Pippa Norris – the ideology of MPs

Research by Pippa Norris (1999a) examines whether the shift to the right in Labour's manifestos is reflected in the ideology of Labour politicians. She uses survey data about more than 1,000 candidates and MPs from the major parties who stood in the 1992 and 1997 elections. The surveys included a range of questions that were used to measure the ideological stances of different candidates. For example, they were asked how far they agreed or disagreed with statements such as 'Ordinary working people get their fair share of the nation's wealth' and 'There is one law for the rich and one law for the poor' and 'Private enterprise is the best way to solve Britain's economic problems.'

Norris found strong evidence that there had been a shift to the right amongst Labour politicians. Compared to MPs and candidates in 1992, those in 1997 were more likely to agree that private enterprise could solve economic problems, and to disagree that major public services should be in public ownership, and that the government should be responsible for providing jobs. In all these respects there was evidence of a drift to the right.

Furthermore, Norris also detected a trend away from a liberal stance and towards what she calls a 'populist stance' on moral and social values. For example, Labour politicians became increasingly likely to endorse 'censorship to uphold moral standards while fewer expressed tolerance of political rights for anti-democratic parties. Many more Labour MPs agreed that "young people today don't have enough respect for traditional values"'.

One exception was the issue of homosexuality where there was a move towards greater tolerance. By comparing the views of Labour MPs first elected in 1997 with those who had already been in Parliament, she found that these shifts were more marked among the new MPs. She also found them to be more evident amongst younger Labour MPs than older ones. Indeed, amongst all parties, MPs under 35 tended to be more right-wing than their older counterparts.

Overall, Norris found a convergence in the values of politicians from the three major parties, with some shift towards the centre from the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats maintaining their centre-left position, and Labour being close to them. Comparing these results with the values of the British electorate as revealed in the election studies, she found that Labour politicians were 'closer to the median British voter than the average Conservative politician'. Labour seemed to have had some success in capturing the middle ground. Indeed, Conservative politicians expressed views which were so far to the right on economic issues that, in 1997, the views of Conservative voters were actually closer to those of Labour and Liberal Democrat politicians than they were to Conservative politicians.

Norris concludes that, in terms of the values of MPs, 'the new House does represent a decisive break with the past pattern of party competition'. With Labour and Liberal Democrat politicians having an ideological position close to the bulk of the British electorate, 'the Conservatives occupy a lonely but distinctive position on the right'. Nevertheless, the attitudes of the younger politicians suggest that the House of Commons might drift further right as younger politicians take the places of older ones.

Paul Webb and David Farrell – the ideology of party members

Webb and Farrell (1999) examine whether the changes in party manifestos and in the ideology of MPs and candidates were reflected in the ideology of party members. Labour saw an increase in party membership from 279,530 in 1992 to 405,000 in 1997, while the Conservative membership fell from 500,000 to 400,000 over the same period. Liberal Democrat membership held steady at around 100,000.

Webb and Farrell found some movement in the values of Conservative members. Generally they had moved a little to the right in the 1980s and then back to the left in the 1990s. However, changes amongst Labour members had been greater. Webb and Farrell say, 'After moving fairly sharply left between 1987 and 1992, they then lurched even more dramatically to the right between 1992 and 1997.' Like Labour MPs and candidates, Labour members also became more inclined to support authoritarian social and moral views. Webb and Farrell argue that the influx of new members joining the party after Tony Blair became leader accounts for much of this change.

Amongst members of all parties Webb and Farrell found that extreme views had become less common. They say, 'In general terms, the gap between party members and voters diminished considerably in the 1990s.' In the past, Conservative members tended to have more right-wing views than Conservative voters, while Labour members tended to have significantly more left-wing views than Labour voters. By 1997 the differences between members and voters were the smallest they had been for decades.

Webb and Farrell therefore argue that the 1997 election may have represented a 'critical realignment in the predominant pattern of party competition in

Britain'. However, they suggest that there is no guarantee that this state of affairs will persist. It is always possible that changing circumstances will produce new ideological splits between political leaders, party members and voters in each party.

Ivor Crewe and Katrina Thompson – dealignment or realignment?

Ivor Crewe and Katrina Thompson (1999) use *British Election Study* data to examine whether the dealignment Crewe had claimed to detect in earlier elections (see pp. 652–4 and 658–9) had continued in 1997. Realignment might have taken place if significant numbers of voters had started to identify with particular parties, when they had not done so in the past. There would be evidence of realignment if the big increase in the Labour vote represented a corresponding increase in its number of loyal supporters. If this had taken place, then it might indicate that 1997 was a critical election because it had changed the level of support the parties could expect at future elections.

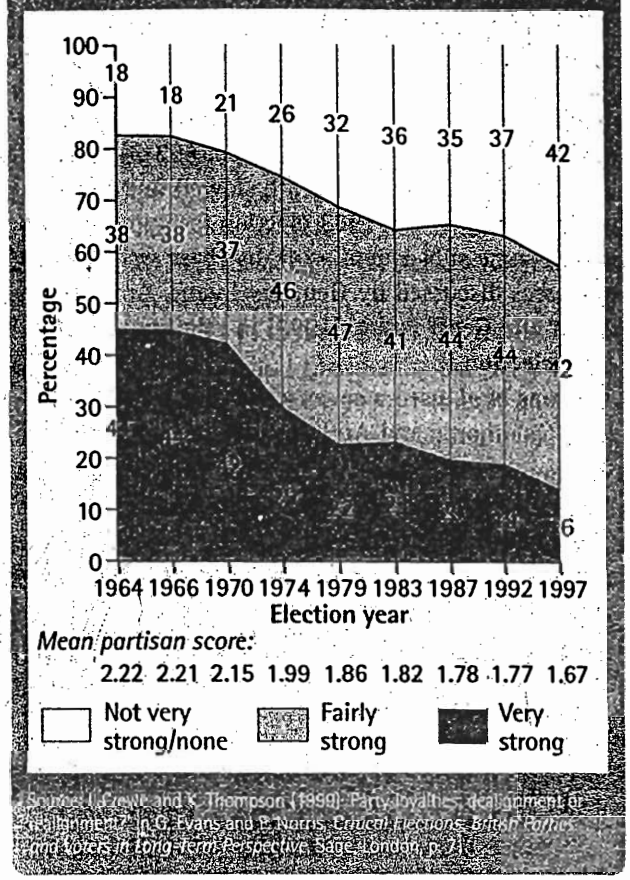
On the other hand, 1997 might be no more than a deviating election if the Conservatives had been 'defeated by a temporary protest of dissatisfied voters' (Crewe and Thompson, 1999).

On the surface, the 1997 election did provide evidence of a dramatic realignment. According to Crewe and Farrell, it saw the biggest change in party identification since 1964. Conservative identifiers went down from 45 per cent to 39 per cent between 1992 and 1997, while Labour identifiers rose from 33 per cent to 46 per cent. The percentage of Conservative identifiers was the lowest it had been since 1964. All of this seemed to indicate that Labour had replaced the Conservatives as the natural majority party, only able to be defeated in exceptional circumstances. If that was the case, then 1997 would certainly have been a critical realigning election.

However, Crewe and Farrell interpret the data differently. They argue that questions about party identification measure little more than current voting preferences. Party identification changes in line with voting and says little about long-term commitments. According to Crewe and Farrell, a better indication of partisanship is found in those who *strongly* identify with a particular party.

Figure 9.7 shows a long-term trend towards declining partisanship, or what Crewe calls partisan dealignment. In 1964, 44 per cent of voters very strongly identified with a political party; by 1997 it was just 16 per cent. Furthermore, in 1997 it was the youngest voters – those in the 18-24 age group – whose partisanship was the weakest. While Labour benefited from a large swing in votes, it could not claim to have gained a large block of loyal and partisan followers.

Figure 9.7 Strength of identification with a political party, 1964–97



Source: I. Crewe and K. Thompson (1999) 'Party loyalties: dealignment or realignment?' in G. Evans and P. Norris, *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-term Perspective*, Sage, London, p. 21.

Crewe and Farrell note that the Labour Party continued to enjoy very high levels of popularity in the period after the election. With so many new supporters, the aftermath of the election provided the potential for substantial realignment towards the Labour Party. Crewe and Farrell describe an 'opportunity to harden the overwhelming but soft partisanship of young voters into a New Labour generation; but these same voters are open to conversion to another party if the government is perceived to fail.'

Labour's success was caused by 'ideological convergence' with other parties, as it shifted towards the ideological middle ground. It was not based on attracting loyal support from particular social groups, or based on specific policy issues. The electoral success and post-election popularity of Labour were largely based upon short-term political factors, such as a divided Conservative Party and a 'buoyant economy', rather than more long-term or fundamental factors. For Crewe and Farrell, then, 1997 was a potentially realigning election, but not one that in itself involved a critical realignment.

Geoffrey Evans, Anthony Heath and Clive Payne – class and voting in 1997

Part of Crewe and Sarlvick's original argument that dealignment was taking place suggested that class dealignment was occurring (see pp. 652–4). This view was questioned by Heath, Jowell and Curtice in their study of the 1983 election (see pp. 655–8), and in some subsequent work by these writers. This issue was discussed by Geoffrey Evans, Anthony Heath and Geoff Payne (1999) in relation to the 1997 election.

Evans *et al.* used a seven-class model devised by John Goldthorpe and Anthony Heath, rather than the simple division between manual and non-manual workers. They found that in 1997 unprecedented proportions of the service classes and other non-manual classes voted Labour.

Table 9.19 shows that, in 1997, over a third of the higher service class and over 40 per cent of the lower service class voted Labour, as did nearly half (49 per cent) of routine non-manual workers. Labour did even better amongst working-class voters but, compared to elections in the 1960s, the gap between the support Labour got from middle- and working-class voters was much narrower. Evans *et al.* note that Labour did no better amongst the working class in 1997 than they had in the 1960s, but between 1964 and 1997 their middle-class support more than doubled.

Table 9.19: Class by party vote for elections, 1964–97 (per cent)

Election	Base	Party	Higher service	Lower service	Routine non-manual	Petty bourgeoisie	Foremen & technicians	Skilled working class	Unskilled working class
1964	*1,359*	Con	65	61	59	74	37	25	26
		Lab	18	20	26	15	48	70	66
		Lib	17	19	15	11	15	5	8
1966	*1,413*	Con	66	56	49	67	35	22	25
		Lab	19	29	41	20	61	73	70
		Lib	15	15	10	13	4	5	5
1970	*1,303*	Con	66	60	51	69	39	33	32
		Lab	22	32	40	20	56	63	61
		Lib	12	8	9	11	5	4	7
1974 Feb	*1,858*	Con	59	51	45	68	39	23	24
		Lab	17	26	29	18	39	59	61
		Lib	24	23	26	14	22	18	15
1974 Oct	*1,746*	Con	57	47	44	70	35	20	22
		Lab	17	30	32	13	52	62	65
		Lib	26	23	24	17	13	18	13
1979	*1,410*	Con	61	61	52	77	44	28	34
		Lab	24	19	32	13	45	58	53
		Lib	15	20	16	10	11	14	13
1983	*2,877*	Con	60	53	53	71	44	33	29
		Lab	8	16	20	12	28	47	49
		Lib/SDP	32	31	27	17	28	20	22
1987	*2,860*	Con	63	50	51	64	39	31	31
		Lab	11	19	26	16	37	48	48
		Lib/SDP	26	31	23	20	24	21	21
1992	*2,131*	Con	66	50	54	66	41	37	28
		Lab	16	21	30	17	45	50	60
		Lib Dem	18	29	16	17	14	13	12
1997	*1,822*	Con	44	37	33	43	21	14	18
		Lab	34	42	49	40	62	67	69
		Lib Dem	22	21	18	17	17	19	13
Change 1992–97		Con	*–22*	*–13*	*–21*	*–23*	*–20*	*–23*	*–10*
		Lab	*+18*	*+21*	*+19*	*+23*	*+17*	*+17*	*+9*
		Lib Dem	*+4*	*–8*	*–2*	*0*	*+3*	*+6*	*+1*

Source: G. Evans *et al.* (1999) 'Class, Labour as a catch-all party?' in G. Evans and P. Norris, *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective*, Sage, London, p. 90.

Evans *et al.* measured the overall relationship between class and voting, using a composite measure of 'changes in the odds ratios between classes and parties across elections' (see p. 656 for a description of odds ratios). The results are given in Figure 9.8.

In Figure 9.8 the 1964 election is taken as a base and other figures show how strong the class and voting relationship was in comparison to 1964. The figure shows what Evans *et al.* describe as 'a generally declining trend from the highest point in 1964 to the lowest in 1997 with some fluctuations in-between'. In 1997, for example, the class–voting relationship was only about 60 per cent as strong as it had been in 1964.

Unlike some of the earlier studies involving Anthony Heath, Evans *et al.* were prepared to admit that class was exercising a decreasing influence on voting patterns by the end of the millennium. However, they argued that this change was largely the result of changes in the Labour Party and its relationship with working-class voters. Statistically, much of the variation in the relationship between class and voting was caused by changes in the relationship between class and Labour voting. Evans *et al.* suggested, therefore, that it might be the changing character of the Labour Party that was largely responsible for the weakening relationship between class and voting. In particular, it might be caused by changes in the ideology and policies of Labour so that it became a party appealing to all classes (a 'catch-all party') rather than one which aimed its appeal specifically at the working class.

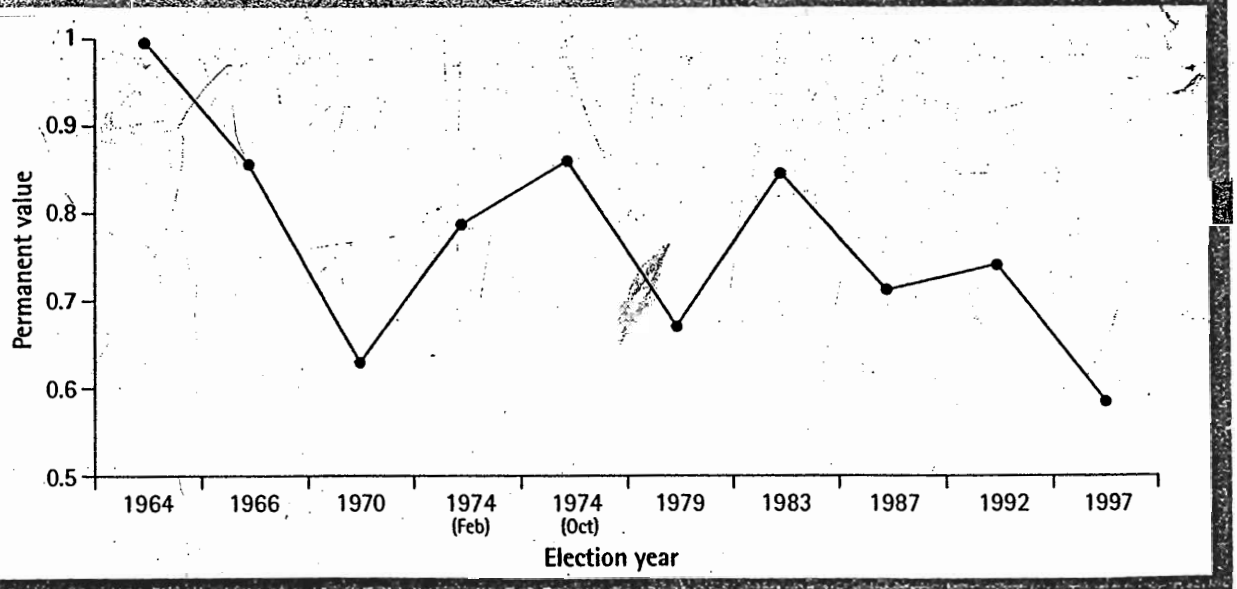
Evans *et al.* noted that the study by Ian Budge (see pp. 673–4) had found that the Labour Party had moved well away from a left-wing ideology by 1997 in an attempt to appeal to middle-class voters. Evans *et al.* looked at data from the *British Election Studies* which measured whether voters thought there was a 'good deal', 'some', or 'not much' difference between the parties. In 1997 only 33 per cent of voters thought there was a good deal of difference between the parties. This compares to 46 per cent giving this reply in 1964 and as many as 82 per cent in 1983 and 84 per cent in 1987.

In general, then, it appeared that the voters accurately perceived that the ideological gap between the parties had narrowed by 1997. Evans *et al.* attribute the decline in class-based voting to this reduction in the perceived ideological gap between the parties. In particular, the Labour Party attracted so many middle-class votes in 1997 because it had largely abandoned left-wing policies which would appeal to working classes but alienate middle classes.

The big fluctuations in the class and voting relationship between elections did not suggest that the changes were part of an inevitable and long-term trend in society. Rather they were a product of short-term political changes within parties. If this was the case, then the relationship between class and voting might strengthen in the future if a more clearcut ideological division between the Conservative and Labour parties returned.

Evans *et al.* therefore conclude that the dip in class voting in 1997 does not show that it was a critical election since it did not necessarily signal a

Figure 9.8 Influence of class on voting



Source: G. Evans *et al.* (1999) 'Class, Labour as a catch-all party?' in G. Evans and P. Norris, *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective*, Sage, London, p. 93.

permanent change. They say, 'The future strength of class voting therefore depends more upon party strategy and electoral appeals than upon secular trends in society.'

Non-class cleavages and voting

If there was no critical change in class voting in 1997, did a critical change take place in the relationship between other social factors and voting? Researchers examined the *British Election Studies* for any major shift in voting according to ethnicity, gender and region. In the process, they were able to examine at least parts of Crewe's earlier arguments that sectoral cleavages might be replacing class divisions as a major influence on voting (see p. 653). Crewe saw region as one important sectoral cleavage but did not see ethnicity and gender as particularly significant.

Ethnicity

Shamit Saggar and Anthony Heath (1999) looked at the relationship between ethnicity and voting. Using data that went back to 1974, they found no evidence of a major shift in the voting of ethnic minorities. Labour attracted between 72 per cent and 83 per cent of ethnic-minority votes in the six elections between October 1974 and 1997; the Conservatives between 7 per cent and 18 per cent. In 1997 an overwhelming 84.8 per cent of blacks and Asians voted Labour, 11.3 per cent voted Conservative and 3.2 per cent voted for the Liberal Democrats. Saggar and Heath conclude that the 1997 election reinforced existing patterns of ethnic-minority voting and that there was no evidence of a critical realignment.

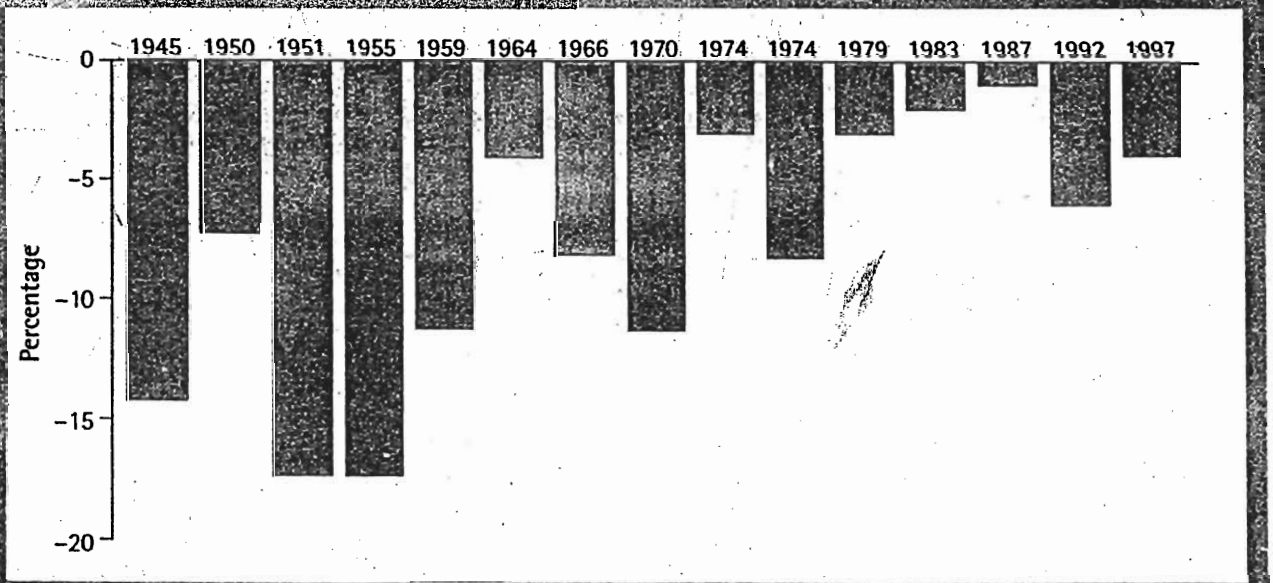
Gender

Pippa Norris (1999b) found more evidence of changes in the relationship between gender and voting. In the 1960s and 1970s, women in Britain were proportionally more likely to vote Conservative and less likely to vote Labour than men.

In most countries, women have traditionally given more support to right-wing parties than men. Recent studies in a number of countries have suggested that the gender gap in voting is reducing. In some countries, such as the USA, the traditional gender pattern has been reversed. Women have gone from being more right-wing than men to being more left-wing.

Figure 9.9 shows the gender gap in post-war British elections. It calculates 'the difference in the Conservative-Labour lead among women minus the Conservative-Labour lead among men' (Norris, 1999b). For example, if the Conservatives had an 8 per cent lead over Labour among women but a 3 per cent lead among men, the gender gap would be 5 per cent. The figure shows that the gender gap has fluctuated considerably, from about 17 per cent in 1951 and 1955, to just around 2 per cent in 1987 and about 4 per cent in 1997. However, the figure does indicate a gradual reduction in the gender gap. Women are no longer much more inclined to vote Conservative than men.

Figure 9.9 The British gender gap, 1964–97



Source: P. Norris (1999) 'Gender: a generation gap?' in G. Evans and P. Norris, *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective*, Sage, London, p. 152

Norris finds that the relationship between gender and voting is influenced by age. Older women are more likely to vote Conservative than older men, whereas younger women are more likely to vote Labour than younger men. Norris argues that:

> *The most plausible reason for this we can suggest is that the younger generation of women spent their formative years during the height of the second wave women's movement, the social revolution in sex roles which occurred in the 1960s, and the change in cultural values associated with feminism.*
>
> Norris, 1999b, p. 162

As older generations of women die and younger generations reach voting age we might therefore expect the gender-gap in voting to be reversed so that women become more inclined to vote Labour than men. Norris concludes that 1997 was not a critical election in terms of gender and voting. Women were still more likely to vote Conservative overall than men were. However, she does anticipate a gradual 'secular realignment' in patterns of gender and voting in line with the leftward drift she has detected among women.

Region and voting

John Curtice and Alison Park (1999) detected two main features of the geography of voting in the 1997 election:

1. The swing from Conservative to Labour was bigger in the southern parts of England than in the northern parts.
2. There was a good deal of tactical voting. In particular, in constituencies where either a Liberal Democrat or a Labour candidate seemed well-placed to unseat a Conservative MP, anti-Conservative voters seemed to switch to the party which had the best chance of defeating the Conservatives.

One consequence of these shifts was that the Conservatives lost more seats than they would have done if the fall in their vote had been evenly spread. Curtice and Park believe that the trends in the 1997 election represented dealignment rather than realignment. Between the mid-1950s and the mid-1980s regional factors exercised an increasing influence on voting. Even when factors such as class were taken into account, Labour gained more support in the north while the Conservatives increased their support in the south. The 1997 election reversed these trends and therefore reduced the influence of region in shaping people's voting preferences. Curtice and Park calculate that, between 1987 and 1997, a quarter of the regional gap in voting preferences disappeared, although southerners were still more likely to vote Conservative than northerners.

Curtice and Park examine a number of possible explanations for the narrowing of regional differences in voting.

First, they consider the idea that it was due to economic differences. While earlier recessions had generally had the most adverse effects on industrial jobs in northern constituencies, by the mid-1990s there were increasing numbers of job losses in services and in the south. So perhaps a sense of economic gloom had spread to the south and turned voters against the Conservative government. However, Curtice and Park found that at the time of the election those in the south of England were more likely than those in the north to believe that the economy was improving. They therefore dismissed this as a way of explaining the narrowing regional gap in voting.

Second, they considered the possibility that the change resulted from the Labour Party deliberately targeting southern voters. As part of their modernization strategy, the Labour Party set out to shed policies that were unpopular with southern voters. In particular, Labour abandoned its commitment to nationalization (which had been Clause 4 of its constitution), distanced itself from trade unions, and promised not to increase income tax.

Curtice and Park found some evidence to support this second theory. Data from the *British Election Study* of 1997 found that, throughout the country, Labour was perceived as being more right-wing than it had been in previous elections. People had noticed the changes in policy and this had affected people's image of the party.

Furthermore, by 1997, those in the south saw the Labour Party as more right-wing than those in the north. This could explain why Labour gained more ground in the south of the country, where much of the electorate was hostile to the more left-wing positions Labour had adopted in previous elections. Curtice and Park comment that 'overall, Labour's modernization project was particularly successful in overcoming negative perceptions and associations that the southern voter had of the party in the 1980s'.

In terms of tactical voting, Curtice and Park estimate that in 1997 nearly 5 per cent of voters switched to their second-preference party (either Labour or Liberal Democrats) in order to defeat a Conservative candidate. In contrast, in 1992 only about 3.5 per cent of voters did this, and in the previous two elections only about 3 per cent. So there was a significant increase in tactical voting. If this were to continue into future elections, then 1997 could be seen as a critical election.

However, this could not be seen as evidence of a critical realignment. The willingness to vote tactically is most common amongst those who do not have strong partisan loyalty to one party. The increase in

tactical voting was therefore indicative of dealignment, particularly among those with left-of-centre views. Curtice and Park argue that:

> *never before had Labour and the Liberal Democrats been felt to have so much in common. And as a result, more voters were relatively indifferent in their feelings towards the two parties while at the same time disliking the Conservatives.*
>
> Curtice and Park, 1999, p. 144

Curtice and Park conclude that most of the evidence points to 1997 as a dealigning election. The north–south divide became less significant, and the closing of the ideological and policy gap between Labour and the Liberal Democrats weakened some people's attachment to either of these parties. The main reason for these changes was that people's perceptions of the parties had changed. The electorate's reasons for choosing to vote for a particular party had not altered radically, but people thought that the Labour Party had changed, making it more attractive to southern voters in particular. This would suggest that the ideological image of parties is an important factor shaping voting behaviour.

Geoffrey Evans – the issue of Europe

Geoffrey Evans (1999) used *British Election Study* data to examine the importance of policies on European integration in the 1997 election. Europe was certainly a significant issue to the political parties. The Conservatives were split over attitudes to Europe. The Euro-sceptic wing of the party opposed further integration in general, and the entry of sterling into a common European currency (the Euro) in particular. Some other senior Conservatives were Euro-enthusiasts and were strongly in favour of more integration. The Labour Party, which had adopted a stance opposed to European integration in the 1980s, was more pro-Europe than the Conservatives by the time of the 1997 election. Although the Labour manifesto did not commit a Labour government to accepting a common currency, it was not hostile to the possibility.

Evans found that, in 1997, Labour voters were more pro-Europe than Conservative voters. In 1992 there had been little difference in the attitudes to Europe among Conservative and Labour voters, and in previous elections it was Labour voters who were more anti-Europe and Conservative voters more pro-Europe. Thus the views of voters supporting these parties had shifted in line with the changing policies of the parties.

Although Evans found that views on Europe seemed to have only a small influence on voting, the issue did cut across traditional class allegiances. Working-class voters who were hostile to Europe were a little more likely to vote Conservative in 1997, compared to pro-Europe working-class voters. Conversely, Labour had more success among pro-Europe middle-class voters than among those who were anti-Europe. Because working-class voters tend to be more hostile to Europe than middle-class ones, the reversal in party policies towards Europe served to weaken the relationship between class and voting. Evans concludes that 'Europe now cross-cuts the left–right basis of voting and because of party realignment on the issue now serves to reduce the effects of class on vote.'

Pippa Norris and Geoffrey Evans – was 1997 a critical election?

Pippa Norris and Geoffrey Evans (1999b) reviewed the findings of all the researchers who analysed the 1997 *British Election Study* in order to decide whether 1997 was a critical election or not.

In terms of the result, they argue that factors such as the large swing from Conservative to Labour, the high level of volatility, and the big increases in the seats won by Labour and the Liberal Democrats do suggest that 1997 was a critical election. However, they point out that 'Labour's landslide was largely the product of the exaggerative qualities of the electoral system rather than landslide of votes.' Despite the size of their majority, Labour got significantly fewer than half of the votes cast.

In terms of changes in party politics, they see the ideological shift in Labour's position as the most significant feature of the election. For only the second time in post-war politics (the other occasion being 1964) Labour manifesto policies were more right-wing than those of the Liberal Democrats (previously the Liberals). Labour also had more right-wing than left-wing policies overall. Labour had broken with many of its socialist policies and adopted 'social liberalism ... emphasizing market incentives, opportunities and civic responsibilities within a devolved state'.

Furthermore, this shift in policies was in line with changes in the views of party members and MPs. Younger MPs were particularly supportive of 'New Labour' policies. The closeness of the Labour and Liberal Democrat policies, compared to the distinctively right-wing policies of the Conservatives, was also a new feature of party competition in 1997.

However, Norris and Evans argue that there is little evidence of any major realignment of the electorate. The evidence points instead to increased dealignment. Fewer voters were strongly identifying with parties in 1997 than in previous elections. Class had declined in significance, but largely because Labour had adopted less left-wing policies. Labour's reversal of policy to become more sympathetic to

European integration lost them some working-class support, thus contributing to class dealignment. Regional and gender factors were exercising a less strong influence on voting, while ethnic minorities continued to offer strong support for Labour.

Overall, Norris and Evans believe that the most significant change in 1997 was the ideological dealignment involved in Labour's move to the centre. However, it was not clear in the aftermath of the election whether this would be a permanent change, or whether Labour would drift back towards more left-wing policies once they were more confident of success in future elections.

In terms of social changes and the relationship between parties and the electorate, Norris and Evans conclude that 'The most consistent evidence suggests a pattern of continuing secular dealignment in the British electorate due to political changes in party competition.' The 1997 election could not, therefore, be regarded as a critical election. It represented a deepening of previous trends towards dealignment and not a radical break with the past.

However, Norris and Evans did think that there was some possibility that 1997 could turn out to have been an important turning point. If Labour could achieve a sense of partisan loyalty amongst the large number of young voters who supported them in 1997, then they might have set in motion processes leading to an eventual realignment of party support in their favour.

Evaluation

Norris and Evans and the other writers who analysed the results of the 1997 *British Election Study* put primary emphasis upon the ideological shift in the Labour Party in explaining the result of the 1997 election. In doing so they rather downplay the role of other possible factors, particularly those relating to the unpopularity of the Conservative Party.

Anthony King (1998) argues that the main factor explaining the 1997 result was the unpopularity of the Conservative Party. He sees the exit of Britain from the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) as the event which triggered the Conservatives' 'loss of reputation'. In previous elections some people had been unwilling to vote against the Conservatives because they believed that the Conservatives were the only party who could be trusted to run the economy competently.

On 16 September 1992 – so-called 'Black Wednesday' – Britain was forced to leave the ERM as the result of speculators such as George Soros selling sterling and buying other currencies. This was despite the assertions of the Conservative chancellor, Norman Lamont, that Britain would not be forced to leave. Although the economy was actually quite successful in the period leading up to the 1997 election, the Conservatives were not seen as responsible. Economic success had followed when the Conservatives had been forced, against their will, to abandon the main plank of their economic policy. After Black Wednesday, Conservative ratings in opinion polls plummeted and never recovered.

Other problems added to the Conservatives' difficulties by the time of the 1997 election. King says that the Conservatives had:

> *forfeited their reputation for economic competence – and their reputations for almost everything else besides – and they also managed to give the impression that they did not desperately care about, or were actively opposed to the great public services on which the great majority of the British people depend. (They also managed, in passing, to appear weak, hopelessly disunited, sleazy and disreputable.)*
>
> King, 1998, p. 205

Labour won the election in the sense that they provided an apparently united, moderate and competent alternative to the Conservatives, but they only attracted so much support because the Conservatives had such a poor image.

If King's analysis is correct, then short-term political factors were more important than the changing ideology of the Labour Party, or deep-seated changes in the electorate. However, the loss of the Conservatives' reputation for economic competence could have longer-term repercussions, making it more difficult for them to win successive general elections in the future than it had been in the period from 1979 until 1997.

Sociology, power, politics, the state and values

As in all areas of sociology, those who adopt a particular perspective on power and politics often claim objectivity and accuse their opponents of ideological bias. As Geraint Parry noted, the early elite theorists such as Pareto and Mosca believed they had established 'a neutral, "objective" political science, free from any ethical consideration' (Parry, 1969). From this standpoint, they dismissed Marxism as little more than ideology. Marxists have replied in a similar vein accusing elite theorists of merely

translating ruling-class ideology into sociological jargon. However, it is doubtful whether any perspective has a monopoly on objective truth. It is possible to argue that all views on power, politics and the state owe something to the ideology and values of those who support them.

The ideological basis of Marxism is clearly visible. Marx was not only a sociologist but a political radical committed to the cause of the proletarian revolution. His writings reveal a vehement hatred of what he saw as the oppressive rule of the bourgeoisie. Marxists are committed to the idea of political equality, believing that it can only be realized in an egalitarian society based on communist principles.

From this standpoint, Marxists condemn the representative democracies of Western capitalist societies. Any reform in the political system which leaves the economic base of capitalism unchanged is seen as merely a concession to the proletariat which serves to maintain the status quo. Given their commitment to communism, it is noticeable that many Marxist writers were far more restrained in their criticisms of political inequality in the former USSR than they were in their criticisms of the West.

From the point of view of elite theory, Marxism is merely wishful thinking. Given the inevitability of elite rule, the egalitarian society is an illusion. However, the early elite theorists are just as vulnerable to the charge of ideological bias. Parry suggests that Pareto and Mosca began with a formula that was little more than a statement of conviction. They then scoured the history books selecting information that fitted their preconceived ideas. These ideas owed much to Pareto and Mosca's evaluation of the masses. They regarded the majority of people as generally incompetent and lacking the quality required for self-government.

Elite theory has often been seen as an expression of conservative ideology. With its assertion of the inevitability of elite rule, it can serve to justify the position of ruling minorities. Attempts to radically change the status quo, particularly those aimed at political equality, are dismissed as a waste of time. The removal of one elite will simply lead to its replacement by another.

Thus, as Parry observed, early elite theory 'offered a defence, in rationalistic or scientific terminology, of the political interests and status of the middle class' (Parry, 1969). In fact, Mosca went as far as to suggest that members of the working class were unfit to vote.

Despite their claims to objectivity and neutrality, the early elite theorists were strongly opposed to socialism. T.B. Bottomore argued that 'Their original and main antagonist was, in fact, socialism, and especially Marxist socialism' (Bottomore, 1966). Thus the debate between Marxists and elite theorists can be seen, at least in part, as a battle between rival ideologies.

Pluralism can be seen as an expression of either conservative or liberal ideology, depending on the point of view of the observer. By implying that Western democracies are the best form of representative government that can be hoped for in complex industrial societies, elite pluralists can be seen to advocate the maintenance of the status quo. The inference from their argument is leave well alone. As Bottomore stated, the elite pluralist conception of democracy as representative government is limited and restricted compared to the idea of direct participation.

A commitment to this idea might well result in a very different analysis of Western political systems. This is evident from Bottomore's own work. He regarded the pluralist view of democracy as a poor substitute for the real thing. His belief that direct participation in politics by all members of society is a realistic alternative to representative government may well be influenced by a commitment to this ideal.

Frank Parkin suggested that 'pluralism is quite plausibly regarded as a philosophy which tends to reflect the perceptions and interests of a privileged class' (Parkin, 1972). Pluralism claims that all major interests in society are represented. However, in an unequal society, the interests of the rich and powerful are likely to be better served than those of the underprivileged. With its emphasis on the representation of all interests, pluralism tends to disguise this situation. It is likely to divert attention from the inequalities that result from the operation of the political process. By doing so it may help to maintain the status quo and provide support for the privileged.

While it has often been seen as a reflection of conservative ideology, pluralism has also been interpreted as a liberal viewpoint. Liberalism is a philosophy which accepts the basic structure of Western society while advocating progressive reforms within that structure. These reforms are directed by a concern for individual liberty and a desire to improve the machinery of democratic government.

Many pluralists admit that Western democracies have their faults, and are concerned to correct them. Thus Arnold Rose admits that the USA is not 'completely democratic' (Rose 1967) and looks forward to a number of reforms to make the existing system more representative. But he accepts that the basic framework of American society is sound and therefore does not advocate radical change.

Pluralism has found particularly strong support in the USA, and many of the important pluralist writers, such as Dahl and Rose, are American. To some degree their writings can be seen as a reflection of American culture. Since the Declaration of Independence, American society has emphasized the liberty of the

individual rather than social equality. In this respect, it is significant that the USA has no major socialist party, unlike most of its West European counterparts.

This emphasis on liberty rather than equality is reflected in pluralist theory. From a pluralist perspective, democracy is a system of government which provides freedom for members of society to organize in the defence and promotion of their interests. Westergaard and Resler claim that pluralists 'value liberty more than equality' (Westergaard and Resler, 1976) and see the free-enterprise capitalist system as 'a bulwark of liberty'. The values of liberty and freedom of the individual are enshrined in the 'American Dream'. As a result, the writings of American pluralists may owe more than a little to the ethos of their society.

While Marxists, elite theorists and pluralists have argued over the values implicit in each other's theories, some postmodernists have argued that strongly-held political ideologies are being abandoned. Furthermore, they welcome this development, arguing that political ideologies create more problems than they solve.

Lyotard (1984), for example, rejects all metanarratives (or big stories) about how society is and how it should be run. He believes that a commitment to an ideology is always dangerous. People who are committed to certain political beliefs will commit inhuman acts in support of their ideology. Political leaders such as Stalin (the second leader of communist USSR) have been responsible for the murder of millions in the name of political ideology. Lyotard welcomes a change to a world in which people no longer believe in political metanarratives. Lacking such strong values, people are less likely to be able to justify the murder of others. To Lyotard, in a postmodern world people turn away from claiming to know absolute truths about society and they become more pragmatic. They believe only in those things that work and have a practical value.

Foucault's work also provides a radical departure from more conventional theories of power. By arguing that power/knowledge are inseparable and that power is all around, Foucault implies that the world cannot be changed by the political ideologies of states and governments. Power is highly dispersed, it is everywhere, and the only way to make any changes is in a piecemeal, localized way. This view can be seen as implying fairly conservative values in which radical and widespread change cannot be achieved.

However, some sociologists claim that writers such as Lyotard and Foucault have failed to escape from the grip of value-laden ideologies. By denying the desirability or possibility of pursuing large-scale or radical changes in society, they become conservatives by default. If nothing can, or should, be changed, then the implication is that the status quo must be accepted. Madan Sarup, for example, says:

> *Politically, it is clear that thinkers like Lyotard and Foucault are neo-conservatives. They take away the dynamic on which liberal social thought has traditionally relied. They offer us no theoretical reason to move in one social direction rather than another.*
>
> Sarup, 1988, p. 140

The label of neo-conservatism is not, however, appropriate for all those calling themselves postmodernists. Others, such as Nancy Fraser (1995), remain committed to ideological struggles, and in many ways offer highly radical views supporting extensive changes in society.

However, Fraser rejects the idea that there is one ideology or issue which should subsume all others. She sees class, race and gender issues as all being important. She supports those whom she sees as struggling against class inequality, racism and sexism. Unlike Marxists, however, she does not see the struggle as an economic one, but rather as one to do with discourse – the way people talk and think about these issues.

In their own way, sociologists like Fraser are as committed to values as Marxists. Like Marxists, they believe in radical change and strive for liberation. Unlike Marxists, they are more likely to support a variety of causes (such as anti-racism, feminism, gay liberation and ecology) rather than one (proletarian revolution). As such, they reflect the plurality of new social movements discussed earlier in the chapter (see pp. 643–7).

Despite the recent developments in theories of power and in politics itself, it is still possible to discern a basic division between those influenced by conservative and those influenced by more radical values. Some of the issues and the terminology have changed, but the basic stances have not.