They Make the Rules:
Political Routines and the Generation of Political Bias

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> Up-people are unbeatable because they make the rules. The underdog's cry of outrage is meaningless before it leaves his lips because up-people own the very language. Freedom is what they mean by freedom, democracy is what they mean by democracy, and they have the power to make their definitions stick.
>
> Colin Morriss
> *Observer* Magazine
> April 1972

In his classic study of power in America, Mills commented on the importance of recognizing the essential flexibility available to those in positions of power in the course of discharging their political roles:

> If most men and women take whatever roles are permitted to them and enact them as they are expected to by virtue of their position, this is precisely what the elite need not do, and often do not do. They may call into question the structure, their position within it, or the way in which they are to enact that position.[1]

This paper is concerned with the way in which the powerful selectively interpret their perceived roles, and redefine the structure in which such roles are embedded. Specifically, it demonstrates, with reference to a case study of power relations and patterns of influence in a London Borough,[2] how the structural context in which political action is situated may be responsive to the interests and assumptions of participants and how a largely unconscious routinization of bias, regularly favouring some interests while prejudicing others, may thereby be generated within political systems.

POLITICAL STRUCTURE AND POLITICAL ACTION

To argue, as Mills does, that powerful groups or individuals may be in a position to manipulate, consciously or unconsciously, the way in which a given political structure is commonly operationalized, is not to ignore the significance of objective structural factors in constraining or even moulding political action. At the level of local decision-making, for example, it is apparent that ecological and economic factors, largely beyond the control of even the most powerful of local individuals, groups, or institutions, may significantly limit both the range of effective options available to decision-makers, and the consequences of such policies as are adopted. Thus Harvey[3] has argued that there inhere within complex urban systems hidden mechanisms of income redistribution with an endemic bias towards increasing inequality, which operate to some extent independently of conscious policies adopted by decision-makers. Miller has similarly pointed to the significance of the aggregate effect on the pattern of the urban environment of the variety of unrelated and unco-ordinated decisions taken by individuals and organizations within a given locality, and similar considerations have led Long to suggest that any search for 'community power' (in the sense of locating responsibility for a particular pattern of distribution of urban resources) may be misdirected, as the causes of much that occurs locally lie more in an 'ecology of games' than in conscious decisions taken by nominal political elites.[4]

Furthermore, it is apparent that certain elements of *political* structure may be 'objective' and deterministic in character, and largely unresponsive to actors' on-going interpretative practices. Institutionalized limitations on the range of power – as, for example, in the case of the relationship between local authorities and higher governmental agencies[5] – are a case in point. Similarly, the capacity of lower-level participants in decision-making bureaucracies to bias agenda-construction and influence policy-implementation may significantly affect both the options considered and the consequences of options adopted, by those who are nominally responsible for decision-making.[6]

Nevertheless, to accept that elements of economic or political structure may restrict or affect conscious political action does not imply acceptance of the perspective adopted by Poulantzas,[7] where men are viewed as reactive agents of the system in which they are located, such that political action is seen as wholly determined by objective structural

factors. As Lukes has noted:

> To use the vocabulary of power in the context of social relationships is to speak of human agents, separately or together, in groups or organisations, through action or inaction, significantly affecting the thoughts or actions of others (specifically, in a manner contrary to their interests). In speaking thus, one assumes that, although the agents operate within structurally determined limits, they none the less have a certain relative autonomy and could have acted differently. The future, though it is not entirely open, is not entirely closed either . . . My claim, in other words, is that to identify a given process as an 'exercise of power', rather than as a case of structural determination is to assume that it is in the exerciser's or exercisers' power to act differently.[8]

Power thus involves choice within structural constraints. This, however, raises the problem, left unresolved by Lukes, of ascertaining where structural determination ends and power begins. And such a problem becomes more acute when the nature of the relationship between political structure and action is considered, for far from being a uni-directional deterministic relationship, it is apparent that, if structure determines action, action may also determine structure – the relationship is dialectical. In other words, in the course of everyday interaction, decision-makers routinely construct joint interpretations of their structural situations, and thereby re-affirm or amend the nature of such situations. As Berger and Luckmann note:

> It is important to keep in mind that the objectivity of the institutional world, however massive it may appear to the individual, is a humanly produced constructed objectivity . . . the relationship between man, the producer, and the social world, his product, is and remains a dialectical one. That is, man (not, of course, in isolation, but in his collectivities) and his social world interact with each other. The product acts back upon the producer. Externalisation and objectivation are moments in a continuing dialectical process.[9]

Thus, Silverman[10] has demonstrated how formal organizational structure is commonly mediated, interpreted, amended, or reconstituted according to the nature of the shared and largely taken-for-granted perceptions of it held by its members, and continually evolved by them in the course of their everyday interaction within the organizational context. Formal rules are thus open to continuous re-interpretation and re-appraisal in the course of their mundane application on the part of an organization's membership. Such a process may be observed in political bureaucracies as much as in any other formal organizations – Gans,[11] in his study of Levittown, noted the disparity between the formal 'performance' face of the town's government, and the less

formal 'actual' procedures, evolved and maintained by members themselves, by which decision-making was actually accomplished. Many studies of local politics in this country have similarly drawn attention to the evolution of unwritten rules and codes of conduct which routinely shape, direct, and give meaning to the interaction of local government personnel, be they councillors or officers. Grant's analysis of rules of the game in local councils,[12] and Budge *et al*'s study of political stratification[13] are good examples of this. Indeed in the course of the case-study reported in this paper, a Chief Officer remarked:

> It's extremely difficult to describe the real decision-making practices. You can construct organisation charts, but these are only the theory, and life isn't like that.

Or, as Hall has observed in a useful paper on the interactionist approach to politics:

> What, in fact, characterises organisational life – that which is repeated, reaffirmed, and reconstructed – are shared agreements, tacit understandings, and contracts, which develop out of processes of give and take, diplomacy, and bargaining. Hence the notion of the negotiated order . . . The fact is that rules are not extensive, clearly stated, or clearly binding. They . . . require interpretation and definition as they apply to specific situations . . . In addition, rules are used and mis-used according to the interests of the participants, and even 'authority' may find it to its advantage to ignore certain rules.[14]

Thus, formal, institutionalized rules regulating members' behaviour may be of less significance in an understanding of the process of decision-making and the subtleties of power than an appreciation of the less rigid, less cohesive, and less explicitly-recognized rules and procedures deriving from the 'sub-universe of meaning'[15] routinely-constructed by members themselves. And as Chambliss has noted, such socially-constructed rules of the game are likely to reflect members' practical purposes:

> Since discretion must be applied for most decisions, this means that it may be applied for any decision the office-holder chooses. If one has a reason to look for it, vagueness and ambiguity can be found in any rule . . . The bureaucracy has a set of precedents which can be invoked whenever the articulated rules do not match up very well with the decision desired by the office-holder.[16]

Informal 'rules of the game' are thus responsive to members' interests, and may facilitate the adoption of regularized patterns of behaviour which owe little to formalized expectations of their behaviour.

To take an example, we may usefully cite the system of shared understandings evolved by leading council members of both party groups in the borough studied. It was apparent that the formal organizational structure of committee meetings and party caucuses within the council was commonly interpreted with reference to an informal structure of private contacts and informal deals, whereby the minority Labour group leadership routinely traded conciliatory opposition for majority group concessions on policy. As the Labour leader put it, 'Half a loaf is better than none.' Or, in the words of a local newspaper reporter:

> Some amazing horse dealing goes on, and a lot of Labour influence takes place behind the scenes. But it's the Labour moderates, rather than the extremists and the idiots, who have the influence and get listened to.

What is interesting about such informal arrangements is that a group of young Labour radicals, newly elected to the council, objected to such rules of the game, and questioned the tacit everyday judgements of their leaders concerning the 'right' or 'normal' way of doing things. Their refusal to support the deals concluded between their leaders and the leading members of the majority group effectively disrupted the informal and socially-constructed structure of decision-making, and led many of the more established members of the council to criticize their policy of open and hostile public opposition. As one Conservative member put it, 'The Labour group could have far more influence than they do, if only they went about it *in the right way*' (emphasis added). Or, in the words of a leading Labour member, 'You can get a great deal done by private chats – far more than by shouting your mouth off.'

This example clearly demonstrates the dialectical relationship between political structure and political action, for it is apparent that formal bureaucratic procedures were routinely interpreted according to a system of informally-shared understandings which itself became objectivated in the course of on-going interaction between the participants. In other words, 'commonsense' assessments of what 'could' and 'could not' be done, and everyday judgements concerning the 'right' or 'normal' way of doing things, were guided by reference, not so much to a world of statute books, standing orders, and minutes, but rather to a system of taken-for-granted understandings which was constantly constructed, maintained, and (in this instance) eventually challenged and substantially revised in the course of everyday organizational life. Members' actions were thus guided, restricted and at times determined by the perceived dictates of a structure for which they were themselves

in large part responsible. From the perspective of this paper, what is crucially significant is that an informal system of shared understandings not only under-pinned interaction within the council, but also mediated relationships between council personnel and representatives of private sectional interests. In other words, if there were intuitively-recognized ways of making decisions within the council, there was a similarly understood set of procedures by which private interests were generally expected to articulate political demands. Miller[17] hinted at just this in his study of Bristol when he noted that overt 'pressure tactics' were condemned by councillors as being 'in bad taste'. Certain types of demands, and particular patterns of demand articulation, thus come to be commonly defined by councillors as acceptable and legitimate, while others do not. It is to a consideration of the nature and consequences of such procedures that the remainder of this paper is devoted.

THE ROUTINIZATION OF BIAS

Bachrach and Baratz[18] have argued that powerful groups may be in a position to safeguard and further their interests by consciously thwarting the articulation of political demands which are contrary to those interests. Thus, a challenge to the status quo may be fended off by the establishment of a committee of enquiry which never reports, by the co-option of the movement's leaders into established elite positions, or by similar manipulative tactics whose consequence is the avoidance of any necessity for decision-making. Such 'power of inertia' – the power to evade action despite potential or manifest opposition – is of great significance in the analysis of political processes, for not only does it occur imperceptively, but it also results in the preservation of the status quo, and hence of the prevalent distribution of privileges among local interests.

Parry and Morriss, however, have argued that such tactics may be better understood, not in terms of conscious and deliberate manipulative action, but rather as inherent qualities of established political systems. There is, they argue, an endemic bias in favour of the powerful and the privileged to the detriment of less powerful interests, contained within the very structure of the routines of ruling:

> It can be difficult for certain demands to penetrate the system and be fully recognised as issues. But this does not necessarily mean that the powerful have to be, or can be seen to be, consciously acting to thwart such demands. They

> may be the unconscious beneficiaries of the bias which does not have to be consciously mobilised by the system. Nor do the various elite groups have to act conspiratorially. One of the consequences of elite consensus is to confirm elite position without the necessity of any display of power in a causal sense.[19]

This insight into the nature of political structure should, however, be considered against the context of the preceding arguments of this paper, for it is apparent that if bias is generated through the everyday operationalization of a given political system, it can only be understood in terms of the way in which that system is interpreted by, and reflected in, the routine actions of its members. The 'routines of ruling' are thus governed by the informal and unexplicated rules of the game evolved by decision-makers themselves. The bias may certainly be unconscious, non-deliberate, and non-conspiratorial, but its beneficiaries are nonetheless also its originators and perpetuators.

Before illustrating this argument in relation to the case-study, it should also be noted that such demands which 'encounter difficulty in penetrating the system' are likely to be those contrary to the interests of those who control the system, if only because, as has already been noted, the rules of the game are constructed according to the latter's interests and assumptions. Thus, Dearlove, in a study of pressure groups in Kensington and Chelsea,[20] has noted that the most successful groups are those whose aims and strategies come to be regarded by decision-makers as 'helpful' and 'responsible', and such groups invariably share the interests and preferences of decision-makers. Or, as Hacker has observed, the most successful groups are those whose representatives share 'a community of interests and sentiment'[21] with the powerful.

There is, in fact, an intimate dialectical relationship between the content of a given political demand, the mode in which it comes to be expressed, and the eventual success it achieves. In other words, if attention is paid to the more 'helpful' and 'responsible' groups, then it will generally follow that such sectional interests with whom decision-makers most readily identify will achieve greatest political success; indeed, as Miliband[22] has noted in relation to national politics, such interests may even come to be routinely equated with 'the public interest' by decision-makers. The converse of this is also true, however. Thus opponents of the status quo, representing interests with which decision-makers do not identify, may be routinely 'excluded'[23] from participation in the political process by virtue of the strategies they are obliged to adopt.

Let us consider this argument in more detail. We have already seen that the greater the conflict between the demands of a given group and the interests of decision-makers, the greater is the probability of such demands being refused or even ignored. This being the case, opponents may anticipate that their chances of success are greater if they attempt to 'force the issue' through resort to public and highly dramatic tactics (such as squatting, rent strikes, demonstrations, disruptions of council meetings, or whatever), than if they 'work through normal channels' (such as writing letters to councillors, arranging meetings with chief officers, and so on). But by rejecting the rules of the game and adopting overtly coercive tactics, such groups invariably lay themselves open to unfavourable classification of their behaviour by decision-makers (e.g. as 'irresponsible', 'rabble-rousing' etc) and thus provide their opponents with a justification for a negative or non-response. Opponents of the status quo thus face a dilemma: whether to abide by the rules of the game, lead a 'responsible campaign', but probably achieve little, or to ignore the rules of the game, adopt 'irresponsible' strategies, and hope that their coercive strength is enough to force action.[24]

It should further be noted, of course, that in practice this dilemma may be less acute, for many opponents of entrenched powerful interests will lack all but the most superficial means for adopting 'responsible' tactics – we may all be in a position to write to our elected representatives, but few members of disadvantaged and relatively powerless sections of a local population are to be found lunching at the Rotary Club, or buying a round at the nineteenth hole. And as Worsley has observed:

> As a general proposition, the more effective the lobby, the less public its activities. Those with the ear of government do not need to organise mass lobbies of the House of Commons.[25]

Public pressure group action may thus be indicative, not of political strength, but of political weakness. Whether or not a particular demand is heard or heeded, and the manner in which the demand is articulated, will thus depend largely on the extent to which it is favoured by the tacitly-understood 'routines of ruling' evolved by local decision-makers. As Ricci has argued:

> A realist might validly conclude that our rights permit us to speak, but they do not oblige our leaders to pay attention.[26]

Finally, it should be noted that an appreciation of the nature of the

dilemma which faces opponents of entrenched powerful interests may cast some light on the continuing debate over the explanation of political inaction. Two explanatory models may be discerned in this debate.

The first, found in the work of Dahl and Wolfinger[27] is based on the argument that every member of a pluralist democracy enjoys the right and capacity to vote, speak, and organize in defence or support of his perceived interests, such that political inaction can be interpreted only in terms of a general and pervasive sense of satisfaction with the consequences of the operation of a given political process. In other words inaction substantiates empirically what Parsons argues theoretically, that power involves the mobilization of binding obligations in pursuit of common interests.[28] From such a perspective, people squeal only when their toes are trodden on.

The alternative model, stemming from the work of Bachrach and Baratz on anticipated reactions, argues that inaction may result, not from a sense of satisfaction, but from a more-or-less conscious appraisal of one's situation as hopeless, such that although perceived preferences may be violated, no action in defence of these preferences ensues due to a sense of political fatalism. It is apparent that such a reaction may be the product of the operation of established exclusion practices by virtue of which particular interests are generally denied effective participation or consideration within a political process.

It may be suggested, however, that such a response need not be conscious and calculative, as Bachrach and Baratz argue. Rather, inaction may simply be an unthinking and routine response to an ongoing situation of exclusion and deprivation. This leads Lukes to suggest that a power model may still be applicable to an understanding of inaction, even where subjectively-recognized and manifest dissatisfaction is not immediately apparent. Thus, citing Crenson's study of inaction in relation to the question of air pollution[29] he demonstrates that objective interests may still be discerned in a given political situation, even where these are not reflected in the participants' consciously held subjective preferences:

> There is good reason to believe that, other things being equal, people would rather not be poisoned (assuming in particular that pollution control does not necessarily mean unemployment) – even where they may not even articulate their preference.[30]

His argument is that an explanation of inaction couched in terms of a power (as opposed to pluralist) model may validly be posited where

there is evidence of a disjuncture between the objective interests of one party (at least, where such interests may be deduced relatively unproblematically) and the results of the action or inaction of the other, and where a causal relationship can be established empirically to explain the generation of such inaction on the part of objectively-disadvantaged interests:

> In brief, we need to justify our expectation that B would have thought or acted differently; and we also need to specify the means or mechanism by which A has prevented or else acted (or abstained from acting) in a matter sufficient to prevent B from doing so.[31]

By adopting Lukes' arguments on the validity and utility of the notion of objective interests, the relative applicability of the two models for explaining inaction may be assessed empirically in relation to particular political situations. Thus, if B's objective interests in relation to a given issue are found to be congruent with the consequences of A's actions or inaction, then B's inaction may be understood (in Weber's sense of *verstehen*) in terms of the pluralist model. If, on the other hand, such interests and outcomes are found to be incongruent, B's inaction may be explained in terms of a power model, provided an adequate explanation of the causal nexus is available. Such an explanation, as we shall see, may be derived from an analysis and appreciation of the routines of ruling.

We are now in a position to develop a typology of power relationships, deriving from the arguments above, which may be illustrated and examined in relation to expirical examples drawn from the case study.

		CONGRUENCE OF OBJECTIVE INTERESTS BETWEEN A AND B	
		'High'	'Low'
Strategy adopted by B to safeguard or further his interests	'CONCILIATORY'	Political osmosis	Conciliatory opposition
	'COERCIVE'	Tactical protest	Intrinsic coercion
	NONE	Political communion	Political exclusion

A typology of power relationships

Ideal-typical strategies available to various actors for safeguarding their interests range on a continuum from conciliation to coercion, with a residual category where no strategy is adopted. Similarly, the degree of congruence between the interests of two parties to a relationship with regard to a given issue varies on a continuum between 'high' and 'low'. Taking these two dimensions together, we may isolate six ideal-type power relationships ranging from conciliation between allies to coercion between adversaries, and from a solidaristic communion deriving from an identity of interests, to political exclusion deriving from an incommensurability of interests. Let us examine each type in turn.

STRATEGIES AND INTERESTS: EMPIRICAL EXAMPLES

The first point to be noted is that the membership of the council in the borough studied was overwhelmingly drawn from the non-manual middle-class sections of the local population, while no less than 48 per cent of members (virtually all of them members of the controlling Conservative group) had a direct business interest. Among the leading members (i.e. members of the 'inner cabinet' policy sub-committee, and chairmen of major committees) were two solicitors, an owner of a chain of newsagents, two property development company directors, an estate agent, and a chartered architect. Commercial interests generally, and property interests in particular, were therefore well represented among the ranks of the decision making 'elite'.

Many leading members of both party groups stressed their concern with 'responsibility' on the part of those with whom they had to deal:

> The opinion of all responsible organizations are listened to in matters of particular interest to them.
>
> – Conservative member

> Any local organization or pressure group can be influential if they go about it in the right way.
>
> – Labour member

Although as we shall see, both private and public patterns of demand-articulation may come to be authoritatively defined as 'responsible' modes of political action, 'going about it in the right way' generally implies the mobilization of private and informal contacts. The activities

of local commercial interests are a case in point.

Case 1: Political Osmosis – the example of commercial interests
Given the personal financial and ideological commitment of many leading council members to business, it was hardly surprising that they should identify closely with the interests of local commercial enterprises. Thus one Conservative member, explaining why the Chamber of Commerce rarely became involved in public campaigns, observed:

> The Council needs the Chamber to take part in policy, therefore the Chamber don't need to be a pressure group . . . They are entitled to very close contact with committees.

Other Conservative members similarly stressed the *right* of the Chamber to be involved in decision-making:

> The council wants to keep well in touch with the Chamber of Commerce. We do this by regular social and semi-social meetings with them and by inviting them to the Town Hall to discuss specific issues.

This definition of the Chamber as a 'responsible' organization had the effect of obviating any necessity for public action by the Chamber, and the tradition thus established of private and informal contacts in turn reinforced this prevailing definition, and strengthened the influence of the Chamber over a wide range of decision-making:

> We enjoy a good relationship with the Borough Council which has been cemented over the years. Individuals on both sides change, but there's a tradition of close cooperation and friendly liaison . . . I've been here three and a half years, and I can't say that we've come unstuck once in all that time . . . The council usually agrees with our suggestions, and amends its policies accordingly.
>
> – Chamber Official

Indeed, in the event of any proposal slipping through this 'early warning system', the interests of the Chamber were safeguarded by virtue of its direct voice in the council itself:

> Councillor D acts as the Chamber watchdog. He sponsors their interests. For example, if there's a matter on the agenda which he feels the Chamber ought to know about, he will generally get the committee concerned to defer their decision until he has consulted the Chamber.
>
> – Conservative member

It is as a result of such informal contacts that the Chamber has, within recent years, not only participated in, but also initiated discussion on, plans for commercial redevelopment in the west of the town. It has similarly successfully intervened at an early stage in a number of road building programmes, at one time promoting the construction, at a cost of £130,000, of a new road designed to safeguard the interests of local shopkeepers threatened by a ring-road plan. The Chamber has been instrumental in the issue of six-day trading, and has routinely been involved in consideration of issues as diverse as parking regulations, the commercial threat of hypermarkets, planning blight, street improvements, and the like. Not once in this period has it mounted a public campaign, and although it is difficult to assess empirically the extent of its influence (if only because of its private nature), it is clearly apparent that its continuous and largely informal activities have consistently influenced local policy-making in favour of the interests of its members.

Of course, the Chamber of Commerce was not the only medium of commercial influence – indeed, a number of large companies based in the borough appear to have used it in a supplementary role for establishing useful contacts, and consolidating contacts established elsewhere, rather than as a 'pressure group' per se:

> The large multi-national companies based in the town rarely do more than hold an annual reception for Chamber members – mind you, they spend a lot on it – and they only do that much if they can be sure that the Mayor, most of the councillors, and the chief officers are going to attend . . . They justify the expense in terms of establishing contacts and goodwill.
>
> – small trader and former Chamber chairman

Many of these larger companies exerted influence, not so much through the Chamber, but directly in relation to council members and officers. Company executives and local political leaders met constantly in a host of different situations – in committees such as Youth Employment and National Savings, on boards such as the Technical College governors, on the local bench,[32] at Chamber functions, at civic dinners or luncheons given by various professional bodies, in a weekly Rotary Club meeting, on the golf course, and so on. As one executive observed:

> The same people keep cropping up in different situations with different hats on . . . Yes, it's just like a village really. Always the same people involved in any activity – the people who run the place, if you like.

Influence was routinely exerted, and 'goodwill' fostered and maintained, by means of such informal (and largely invisible) contacts:

> When there's something we're concerned about, we begin to think how long it has been since the Mayor last came to lunch.
>
> – manager of a company employing over two thousand people

> We don't have any men on the council as yet, but we have good contacts with councillors and officers. There's always someone in higher management who knows the appropriate man on the council whenever a problem occurs.
>
> – executive of a multi-national company

The establishment of sound, informal contacts with local decision-makers was highly valued by these companies and although this had direct short-term consequences, its main effect was to ensure a favourable local political climate for the future. For example, one company had twice applied for planning permission for new buildings in the almost certain knowledge that such permission would be granted:

> You don't ask for a bloody great factory belching out smoke in the middle of the High Street, but as long as your demands are sensible, they are invariably met.

Large expenditure, both in terms of time devoted to work on committees, the magistrates' bench, the Chamber, etc., and in terms of money spent on dinners, receptions, and the like, was therefore explicable in terms of investment in future goodwill. Golf matches were arranged with teams of councillors and magistrates in order to '. . . get to know these various people on a different basis'. Gifts of silver were made to the council in appreciation of its easy working relationship with local business:

> There is a happy relationship between the council and big business . . . (one firm) has given pieces of silver to the council on various occasions to mark their appreciation of the friendly spirit.
>
> – leading Labour member

Dinners were arranged for civic dignitaries. And, in at least one case, gifts were made to individual council members – a large food processing company sent hampers to all members upon its initial arrival in the town:

> Obviously, there's a fine distinction between respectable involvement and dirty tactics . . . We did it to let these people know we'd arrived in the town . . . Most of them thought it was a splendid gesture . . . It's ridiculous to think that men in public office could be bribed by a few packets of tea.[33]

Such concern with establishing goodwill, and the consequences of such goodwill (once it has become established) in providing informal and regular access to decision-makers, illustrate the significance of the pervasive yet almost imperceptible influence achieved by certain commercial interests and by the Chamber of Commerce in relation to local decision-makers. The 'community of interest and sentiment' (to use Hacker's lucid phraseology) shared by local businessmen and leading decision-makers rendered pressure tactics unnecessary and conspiracies irrelevant, for suggestions and ideas passed regularly, almost unnoticed, like osmosis, between them.

Case 2: Conciliatory Opposition – the examples of middle-class mums and tenants' associations

A very different pattern of political activity emerges from consideration of the strategies employed and success achieved by groups whose demands or interests diverge from the ideological concerns of the council leadership, and who lack the kind of close cooperative relationship which business activists enjoy with local decision-makers. As we have seen, such groups must effectively make a choice between conciliatory and coercive strategies, with all the implications of 'political responsibility' which this implies. Two groups which have embarked on the former course of action in pursuit of their interests in recent years are a predominantly middle-class community association, which has campaigned for adequate day nursery provisions in its area, and local Tenants' Associations representing tenants on Local Authority housing estates.

The level of day nursery provisions for children under five in the borough is relatively low. Figures for 1972-73, for example, demonstrate that the council spends 40 per cent less per thousand population under five than the average spent by all London Boroughs on this service. It was in response to this shortage of nurseries that the community association mounted a public but orderly campaign for more day nursery facilities. The campaign began with a short march to the Town Hall (a longer route was abandoned following a police request, thus demonstrating the association's respect for law and order). Inside, the mothers sat respectfully quiet during the debate, and remained

peaceful when the motion for more nurseries was defeated. The next month saw a second, equally good-humoured demonstration during which a young child presented the Mayoress with a bouquet of flowers and a petition. Again, however, the motion was lost. After a third demonstration, the association's leaders were invited to discuss the issue with various council officers, but still no firm concessions were achieved. Over the following months, the association maintained its pressure, and demonstrated the extent of the demand for nurseries by publishing the results of a highly successful house-to-house survey. Eventually, after six months, the Chairman of the Social Services Committee announced that a new day nursery would be provided in the association's area, and indicated that this decision was a consequence of the well-organized campaign. Peaceful demonstrations, large petitions, impressive surveys, general good humour and persistence thus succeeded in influencing Local Authority decision-making.

The Tenants' Associations provide a further example of 'conciliatory opposition', for although they organized campaigns and rent strikes in opposition to rent increases during the 1950s, their subsequent actions have become remarkably responsible. Unlike the nursery campaigners, tenants' leaders enjoy some degree of regular access to councillors and officers – e.g. through regular meetings with the Housing Manager – and have rarely resorted to public campaigns of any description:

> You have to act responsibly . . . Demonstrations in the High Street aren't our line . . . The only way you can hope to do anything is through formal consultation.

Tenants' leaders have achieved a number of relatively minor successes through such consultative procedures – council subsidy of community centres, prevention of heavy-lorry parking on estate roads, the loan of ballot boxes and the use of local polling stations for Association leadership elections, and so on. But in other issues, the Tenants' Associations remain relatively impotent. Rents were increased to a 'fairer' level prior to the introduction of the 1971 Housing Finance Act with scarcely a murmur from them. Facilities on Local Authority housing estates remain scanty. And the public housing construction record in the borough is among the lowest in London. On issues such as these, the Associations do little, being both inactive and ineffective. As a leading 'moderate' Labour councillor observed:

> They're not very important. They've become individualistic, they don't care about the wider Labour movement, and they don't care about other tenants elsewhere.

In large part, the relationship between tenants' groups and the Local Authority is one of institutionalized conflict. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the case of one Association which owes its very existence to the help and suggestions of the Housing Manager, who told a meeting of tenants that they needed an organization to represent their interests in relation to the council! Thus, formal contacts with council members and officers afford the opportunity for successful influence within certain limits, while effectively precluding consideration of a variety of significant issues which fall outside those limits.

It is apparent from the examples of the nursery campaign and the Tenants' Associations that conciliatory opposition, following the adoption of 'responsible' strategies (be they orderly demonstrations or formal negotiations), may prove relatively successful insofar as it avoids challenging central tenets of council policy and ideology. Thus the provision of one new day nursery did not entail great financial or ideological cost on the part of the council elite; nor did a subsidy of a few hundred pounds for an estate community centre. It may be argued, however, that to the extent that opposition occurs to more general and fundamental (rather than particular) aspects of council policy, adoption of conciliatory strategies may prove of less value. If the issues had concerned the level of social services expenditure rather than the provision of one day nursery, or the level of council house rents and council house building rather than the subsidization of a community centre and the problem of lorry-parking, the outcomes may have been very different.

Case 3: Tactical Protest – the example of the 'Save Our Schools' movement

At first glance, there would appear little reason for those whose interests are congruent with the interests of decision-makers to pursue them through apparently coercive tactics. It is, after all, a central feature of the argument advanced in this paper that overt pressure tactics are unnecessary in such situations, and that interest articulation by such groups will, where it occurs at all, achieve considerable success less openly. There are, however, some noticeable exceptions to this which, when examined in more detail, literally prove the 'rule'. One such is the campaign mounted by middle-class parents in the mid-sixties against the introduction of comprehensive reorganization of secondary education.

Following the Labour government's circular 10/65, which called on all local authorities to submit comprehensive education proposals, the

council reluctantly produced a plan which it held in abeyance until 'public opinion' could be consulted. The Minister was reported to be satisfied with the proposals, local teachers' organizations and the Campaign for the Advancement of State Education gave them qualified support, and the Head Teachers' Association accepted them by a majority of three to one. The Save Our Schools movement (a loose organization of middle-class parents) was rather less satisfied, however, and a public campaign was mounted with the aim of forcing the council to reconsider its scheme. A public meeting was called at which the council leader, local ward representatives, and chief officers were loudly criticized and condemned by hundreds of irate parents, to such a degree that the council leader, rising from his chair, told his 'critics', 'It is our duty to do as you would wish'. He subsequently instructed his group members to veto the plan at the next council meeting and this they did.

This apparent triumph for coercive tactics can only be understood in a wider context, however, for it is apparent that the preferences of the Save Our Schools movement and of the council leadership were in fact congruent from the very outset of the issue. Comprehensive proposals were only formulated in response to pressure from Central government, and as such the subsequent public opposition to the plan was not so much the cause of its abandonment as the rationalization for it. As the *Times Educational Supplement* put it at the time (21.1.66):

> The Conservative councillors . . . were at best reluctant champions of their own scheme, and, like most people, the public opinion they paid heed to was the public opinion of their own side.

Public opposition thus obscured an underlying consensus, and was used by both the campaigners *and* the council leadership to reject a policy which neither desired. (A similar picture emerges from consideration of other middle-class public protests, such as various Residents' Associations' campaigns against proposed housing developments in suburban areas. Here too, the interests of the residents have generally coincided with those of the council leadership – see 5, below – and the extent of public protest has been used by the latter to justify refusal of planning permission.)

Analysis of such 'tactical protest', which has frequently met with considerable success, points once again to the crucial significance of the content of political demands and their relation to the manner in which they come to be articulated, for it is apparent that the assessment by decision-makers of action as 'responsible' is in large part determined by their perceptions of the demands being made. Demonstrations and

angry scenes may, as the discussion of the comprehensive education issue has shown, be viewed as 'responsible' – as reasonable citizens exercising their democratic rights to protest – provided the demands thus articulated are congruent with decision-makers' preferences and interests. Yet, as we shall now see, qualitatively similar behaviour may equally be condemned as 'irresponsible' – as rabble intent on disruption – where such congruence is not in evidence. Political responsibility and political consensus are thus two sides of the same coin.

Case 4: Intrinsic Coercion – the example of the 'militants'

Parkin[34] has argued that 'exclusion' practices operationalized on the part of the powerful and privileged in defence of the status quo may bring forth a 'solidaristic' response from those excluded, in the form of a united challenge to the existing pattern of power and privilege. Indeed, such a response may, as was noted in note 24, achieve greater success than the more conciliatory approach discussed in case 2, for such a challenge may force powerful interests to take notice. In the study discussed here, however, such action met with little success.

In 1969, for example, an ad-hoc organization of left-wing groups (the Radical Action Group) mounted a campaign of protest against council cuts in grants to local voluntary welfare bodies such as the Spastics Society. The Guild of Social Service had already complained about the cuts during formal negotiations with council officers and members, but with no success. The Guild's conciliatory strategy having failed, the Radical Action Group determined on a course of coercive protest. Their campaign culminated in the physical disruption of a council meeting and the ejection of the demonstrators by police. The chairman of the Guild of Social Service, no doubt mindful of the significance of 'political responsibility', dissociated his organization from what he termed, 'this rather unfortunate incident'.

This pattern has since been repeated on a number of occasions by diverse groups protesting about various issues. In 1972, for example, at the same time as mothers were parading quietly outside the Town Hall as part of their day nursery campaign, demonstrators inside were shouting, stamping and hurling leaflets in protest against a rise in council house rents. The local newspaper editorial summarized the reactions of most leading councillors when it concluded:

> No-one emerged with very much credit from the shambles that was the council meeting on Monday – unless it were the women demonstrating peacefully outside the Town Hall for day nurseries. Their conduct was reasonably responsible. On the other hand, the rabble that filled the public gallery . . . have nothing to be proud of.

Similarly, more recent disruptions on the part of social workers and homeless families protesting about the lack of accommodation in the borough have met with little success but considerable criticism. The same is true also of other coercive campaigns – the squatters complaining about the council's policy on council house building and temporary accomodation (see later), or council tenants dumping their children at the Welfare Offices in protest against living conditions in high-rise flats. Invariably in such cases, not only has intrinsically coercive action failed to accomplish its professed objectives, but it has attracted such hostile criticism and comment from decision-makers that the quality of the demands has received little public prominence relative to the methods employed to make them. Due largely, it would seem, to the numerical weakness of such protest movements, coercive strategies on the part of under-privileged sections of the local population have thus generally produced less effect than the more restricted types of action discussed in case 2.

Case 5: Political Communion – the examples of the suburban middle-class and commercial interests

We have seen that, according to Dahl and Wolfinger, inaction may be taken as indicative of a fundamental consensus of values, whereby the interests of various inactive sections of a local population come to be routinely anticipated by decision-makers without the necessity of their being articulated. Such was certainly the case in the borough studied in relation to two particular sections of the population – the suburban middle-class, whose interests lay in low housing densities and preservation of green belt restrictions on development (both of which maintained the pleasant residential character of the suburbs, and kept property values buoyant in such areas), and the town's business community, whose interests lay undeniably in increased prosperity.

One of the majority group's central policies in relation to housing development was that areas of low housing densities should be immune from any high density development, and that 'green belt' and other relatively undeveloped parts of the Borough should be preserved. Such areas of low densities and open spaces were located almost entirely in the southern part of the Borough – the middle-class 'stockbroker belt'. This policy was outlined by a council officer at the recent Greater London Development Plan enquiry in the following terms:

> We are in a dilemma. The Council quite appreciate the fact that they have to, and would wish to, help with the overall problem of housing in London, but

> they have quite firm policies, some of which are the same as the G.L.C.'s, with regard to green belt and open space and building on allotments. They also have got policies with regard to densities. They are very concerned that, in fact, they maintain the environmental standard of particularly the outer areas of the Borough; the southern part of the Borough, where you have under present thinking fairly low densities.

Planning permission for any development of more than five houses per acre in the south was rarely, if ever, granted. Yet development at up to four times this density was generally deemed acceptable in northern, predominantly working-class areas. Similarly, where land became available in the north, it was invariably zoned for housing rather than recreational uses, while at the same time, vast areas of open land in the south were rigorously protected from any development. Local councillors representing southern wards made regular assurances to local Residents' Associations that this policy would continue:

> People will not be allowed to flood into the area to live.
>
> – Conservative member

> I will defend the green belt . . . I am not in favour of development on green belt land.
>
> – Conservative member

Despite the manifest bias of this policy in favour of the southern middle-class residents, it was generally defended and justified by both council members and southern Residents' Associations' spokesmen in terms of its being in the public interest. Such curious logic was exemplified by one Residents' Association committee member:

> I don't see why they (i.e. northern residents) cast covetous eyes at our bit of green belt – they can always come and visit it anytime.

Thus, with the constant demand for additional housing, congested northern wards became further congested while areas of low densities and open aspects in the south were preserved intact 'for the benefit of all'. A similar tale emerges from consideration of the council's routine anticipation of local commercial interests. For example, a series of ten multistorey car parks was planned for the town centre at a total cost of five million pounds or more. The explicit aim of this programme was to attract further custom into the stores in the town centre, and especially into the shops in a new shopping precinct:

> They are needed for the pedestrian precinct shops and surrounding area.
>
> – Chairman of Highways

> We must not strangle the town, particularly around the pedestrian precinct, because people want to park there.
>
> – Conservative member

Five per cent of the Local Authority's annual budget for several years to come has been reserved for the car park construction programme. Indeed, so intent is the local political elite on completing the programme that, faced with the necessity of cutting back on expenditure in Spring 1973, it authorized large reductions in spending on health, education, and social services, in order to allocate £500,000 to the development of the sixth car park in the series. As one local newspaper reporter noted:

> The bland statement from Ald. A. that another multistorey is needed for the benefit of business premises in the town centre underlines the fact that the council's heart beats with the jangling of a cash register. What about the people of the town who are not centre shop-keepers or their customers?

Here again, a policy directed to the furtherance of sectional interests was explained and justified (whenever justifications were called for) by those responsible in terms of 'the public interest'. Just as the interests of the suburban middle-class were routinely defined as the interests of all, so too an unquestioned equation was drawn between what is good for business and what is good for the Borough as a whole.

It is, of course, no coincidence that the very groups which benefited most from the council's policies were the same groups from which the great majority of political elite members were drawn. This is not to argue that leading council members deliberately and consciously 'feathered their own nests' – many of them genuinely claimed altruistic motives for their 'public service'. But the public which they chose to serve was a very restricted and distorted public. It was the public of the prosperous and the commercial – groups whose needs they recognized, with whose interests they were familiar, and with whom they could readily and routinely identify. Such groups, therefore, rarely had to mobilize in pursuit or defence of their interests, for their interests were carefully safeguarded by the most powerful members of the local political elite as a matter of routine.

Case 6: Political Exclusion – the example of the homeless

If the inaction of the suburban middle-class in relation to housing densities, and of the business community in relation to car parking provisions, can be explained in terms of the satisfaction of their

interests (i.e. the pluralist model), it is apparent that the cause of the conspicuous silence of a number of less privileged groups lies elsewhere.

It may be suggested that it is objectively in the interests of the homeless and the ill-housed to gain adequate accommodation, just as it is in the interests of the needy to enjoy access to adequate welfare services or of the young to enjoy adequate educational facilities. Yet such interests have achieved a low priority in council decision-making over the years. Thus, the council spends less than any other London borough on school books, stationery, and materials, a government report found its library service to be grossly inadequate, and its primary school classrooms are the most overcrowded in London. Similarly social services expenditure per 1000 population amounts to only 70 per cent of the average for all London Boroughs. The Rateable Value of the borough is among the highest in the G.L.C. area, yet the rate levied is among the lowest, due in part to the tight restriction of social and educational spending.

A similar picture emerges in relation to housing. The 'active' waiting list is approaching three thousand families, while the total waiting list exceeds seven thousand. Temporary accommodation is saturated (despite the operation of regulations with regard to homeless families which are among the strictest in the country)[35] yet expenditure on temporary accommodation per 1000 population stands at less than 60 per cent of the London average. Despite the enormity of the problem, the council builds fewer houses per 1000 population than virtually any other borough in London, while encouraging private developers to use available development land to build large and expensive houses at low densities.[36] Furthermore, a ring-road development cutting through traditional working-class residential areas has deprived hundred of families of their homes, thereby compounding the effect of the housing shortage, as displaced families are given priority for rehousing while the active waiting list continues to grow.

The council elite's unwillingness to build more houses, like its reluctance to increase social and educational expenditure, is a result principally of its commitment to a low rate policy, the chief beneficiaries of which are the larger commercial and residential property owners. Where large scale expenditure has been authorized, it has generally favoured commercial interests rather than the interests of less privileged groups: we have already seen how spending on health, education, and social services was cut back in 1973 while £500,000 was allocated to the construction of another town centre car park. Yet objectively disadvantaged groups such as the homeless generally do

nothing to assert their collective interests, or to prevent the pursuit of policies (such as the ring-road scheme[37]) which effectively worsen their situation.

One possible explanation for such inaction lies in the regularized exclusion of these interests from the local political process. Thus, from the perspective of the council elite, homelessness and escalating demand for Local Authority accommodation are seen as problems about which they can do little – the primacy accorded to the concern with commercial prosperity, low housing densities, private development, and low rates is never questioned, with the result that fundamental solutions to the problems are never considered.

For the homeless themselves, 'responsible' action is recognized as ineffective against the stark fact of the lack of accommodation, and the bureaucratic brick wall of the points system for allocating housing. 'Irresponsible' action, on the other hand, achieves even less as we have seen. There is seemingly nothing they can do, so they do nothing. In such a situation, Parsons' view of power as the pursuit of common goals becomes almost absurd, while Wolfinger's argument that inaction is evidence of satisfaction becomes untenable. The objective conditions for political action are present, but the effective means are absent. Where the interests of a given group, such as the homeless, are not defined as salient (at least relative to the interests of other groups) by decision-makers, and where the members of such a group lack the coercive strength to enforce effective consideration of their interests, the result is a political void.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, it has been argued that an adequate appreciation of political processes must take account of the way in which political structure is maintained, interpreted, and operationalized through the everyday interaction of its members. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated with reference to a case study that the routine operation of political structure, as mediated by members' tacit assumptions and practical purposes, may generate a largely unconscious and possibly unintended bias in favour of certain interests to the detriment of others. It has been argued that there exists a dialectical relationship between interests and the availability of effective means for realizing and pursuing such interests; specifically, the greater the congruence

between the interests of a particular party and those of a given political elite group, the greater is the likelihood of conciliatory rather than coercive strategies being adopted, and the greater is the subsequent probability of such interests being heeded. It may be suggested that the vertical axis of the typology developed in this paper is more salient than the horizontal axis in the determination of political outcomes – as the analysis of the 'Save Our Schools' movement indicated, even apparently coercive strategies may come to be defined as 'responsible' (and hence deserving of attention) by decision-makers where there is a fundamental coincidence of interests. It may be therefore, that the political elite's professed concern with 'responsibility' functions more as a justification for its subsequent action or inaction than as an explanation for it. This is not to suggest, however, that strategy is irrelevant in the determination of outcomes, for there have been examples of successful pressure group campaigns (such as that over day nursery provisions, for example) mounted by groups whose interests and goals have diverged from those of the political elite. Such campaigns in achieving their success, have invariably involved careful choice of strategies (e.g. petitions, peaceful and well-regulated demonstrations, protest letters, etc.) whereby the charge of 'irresponsibility' has been avoided, they have rarely challenged the more fundamental aspects of council policy, and their eventual success has in large part been attributable to the willingness and ability of their members to incur high personal costs in terms of time, money and energy over a long period.[38]

This paper has also demonstrated how the interests – means dialectic may provide an explanation, not only of the generation of particular types of political activity, but also of specific types of inaction. Altshuler has defined consensus as, 'the absence of articulate opposition, not as the presence of unanimous support',[39] and it is apparent from the evidence cited that, while a lack of political activity may in some cases be due to the routine anticipation of sectional interests which may be equated by decision makers with the 'public interest', it may in other cases be a consequence of the operation of political procedures whose effects, intended or unintended, are generally to suppress the effective articulation of interests fundamentally opposed to the status quo. The arguments of this paper may therefore be usefully applied to the continuing debate on the concept of non-decision-making.

It is apparent, then, that bias may be consistently generated by virtue of the continuing implementation of established and largely informal political procedures which, though limited in scope by the formal organizational context in which they are embedded, are never-

theless flexible and responsive to the interests and assumptions of those who maintain them. An adequate explanation of how political systems work must therefore take into account the effect of members' mundane and largely taken-for-granted actions and procedures in reproducing and operationalizing a system which then gives rise to such bias.

NOTES

1. C. W. Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 24.

2. The study, conducted between 1971 and 1973, has been fully described in my Ph.D. thesis (University of London, Chelsea College, 1975).

3. D. Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973).

4. D. Miller, *International Community Power Structures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970) and N. Long, 'The Local Community as an Ecology of Games', *American Journal of Sociology:* **64** (1958), 251-61.

5. See, for example, R. Pahl, *Urban Managerialism Reconsidered* (paper read at the Symposio de Sociologia Urbana, Barcelona, January 1974).

6. See D. Mechanic, 'The Sources of Power of Lower Participants in Complex Organisations', *Administrative Science Quarterly:* 7 (1962), 349-64. This has also been discussed in relation to company decision-making by R. Pahl and J. Winkler, 'The Economic Elite: Theory and Practice', in P. Stanworth and A. Giddens, *Elites and Power in British Society* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 102-22.

7. N. Poulantzas, 'The Problem of the Capitalist State', *New Left Review:* 58 (1969), 67-78.

8. S. Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974), 54-5 (emphasis in text)

9. P. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 78.

10. D. Silverman, *The Theory of Organisations* (London: Heinemann, 1970).

11. H. Gans, *The Levittowners* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967).

12. W. Grant, 'Local Councils, Conflict, and Rules of the Game', *British Journal of Political Science:* **1** (1971), 253-5.

13. I. Budge, J. Brand, M. Margolis, and A. Smith, *Political Stratification and Democracy* (London: Macmillan, 1972).

14. P. Hall, 'A Symbolic-Interactionist Analysis of Politics', *Sociological Inquiry:* **42** (1972), 43-4.

15. Berger and Luckmann, op. cit.

16. W. Chambliss, 'Vice, Corruption, Bureaucracy, and Power' in his *Sociological Readings in the Conflict Perspective* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1973), 359-60.

17. D. Miller, op. cit.

18. P. Bachrach and M. Baratz, *Power and Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

19. G. Parry and P. Morriss, 'When is a Decision not a Decision?' in I. Crewe (ed.), *British Political Sociology Year Book:* I (London: Croom Helm, 1974), 332.

20. J. Dearlove, 'Councillors and Interest Groups in Kensington and Chelsea', *British Journal of Political Science:* 1 (1971), 129-53.

21. A. Hacker, 'Power to do What?' in I. Horowitz, *The New Sociology: Essays in Social Science and Social Theory in Honour of C. Wright Mills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 141.

22. R. Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (London: Quartet Books, 1973).

23. See the discussion of exclusion practices by F. Parkin, 'Strategies of Social Closure in Class Formation' in his *The Social Analysis of Class Structure* (London: Tavistock, 1974), 1-18.

24. Some observers suggest that the adoption of such coercive strategies by underprivileged sections of the urban population may increase in the future. Certainly there is evidence of the success which such strategies can bring. See, for example, R. Bailey, *The Squatters* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973); G. Clark, 'The Lesson of Acklam Road' in E. Butterworth and D. Weir, *Social Problems of Modern Britain* (London: Fontana, 1972), 181-6, and B. Moorhouse *et al*, 'Rent Strikes – Direct Action and the Working Class' in R. Miliband and J. Seville (eds.), *The Socialist Register 1972* (London: Merlin Press), 133-56. The problems encountered in organizing such solidaristic movements are immense, however – see C. Pickvance, *From Social Base to Social Force: Some Analytical Issues in the Study of Urban Protest* (paper read at the 8th World Conference of Sociology, Toronto, 1974) – and we shall see that even the limited success of more institutionalized approaches may exceed that achieved by overtly coercive tactics.

25. P. Worsley, 'The Distribution of Power in Industrial Society' in P. Halmos, *The Development of Industrial Societies,* (Keele, Sociological Review Monograph, number 8, 1964), 20.

26. D. Ricci, *Community Power and Democratic Theory* (New York: Random House, 1971), 187.

27. See R. Dahl, *Who Governs?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961) and R. Wolfinger, 'Non-decisions and the study of Local Politics', *American Political Science Review:* 65 (1971), 1063-80.

28. T. Parsons, 'On the Concept of Political Power', in his *Sociological Theory and Modern Society* (New York: Free Press, 1967).

29. M. Crenson, *The Un-Politics of Air Pollution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971).

30. S. Lukes, op. cit., 45.

31. Ibid., 41-2.

32. See also D. Bartlett and J. Walker, 'Inner Circle', *New Society* (April 24, 1973) for a discussion of the significance of membership of the Magistrates' Bench in Rochdale.

33. Just as I have argued that 'responsibility' is not so much an intrinsic quality of behaviour as a negotiated and socially-constructed definition of it, so too it is apparent that 'corruption' is a problematic concept, the meaning of

which is dependent upon specific social contexts. See, for example, S. Chibnall and P. Saunders, *Worlds Apart: Notes on the Social Reality of Corruption* (Unpublished paper, University of Essex, 1974).

34. F. Parkin, op. cit.

35. Until recently, for example, a six-week time limit was imposed on homeless families' occupation of temporary accommodation, after which time children were taken into care. Or, to take another example, the Chairman of the Social Service committee announced in 1974 that families would no longer be considered 'homeless' if they refused the council's first offer of accommodation, no matter how unsatisfactory it may be.

36. This is amply-demonstrated by the following figures:

	L.A. DWELLINGS BUILT PER PRIVATE DWELLING BUILT		L.A. DWELLINGS BUILT PER 1000 POPULATION		PRIVATE DWELLINGS BUILT PER 1000 POPULATION	
Year	All London Boroughs	Case Borough	All London Boroughs	Case Borough	All London Boroughs	Case Borough
1969	2.1	0.2	2.2	0.2	1.1	4.2
1970	2.5	0.1	2.9	0.3	1.2	3.2
1971	2.2	0.2	2.4	0.3	1.1	2.3
1972	2.0	0.1	2.0	0.2	1.0	2.4
1973	1.4	0.2	1.5	0.2	1.1	1.9
1974*	1.9	0.6	*	*	*	*

*1974 figures relate only to the first six months. Computed from: 'Local Housing Statistics, England and Wales' (HMSO, appropriate years).

37. One group of residents, discovering too late that their homes lay in the path of the ring-road, did make some attempt to stop the development, but their campaign soon collapsed in the face of a seemingly inevitable and unstoppable proposal. There is a parallel here to Batley's observations on planning procedures in Newcastle: 'The assumption was that plans would be so well advanced when they were exposed to public comment, that then they would only have to be explained for their rationality and good sense to be accepted' – R. Batley, 'An explanation of non-participation in planning', *Policy and Politics:* 1 (1972), 107. Such effective use of the *fait accompli*, whether as a matter of routine or as a conscious manipulative device, is another example of how hostile political action may be avoided by elite groups.

38. And, of course, such a capacity to bear the various costs of protracted campaigns may prove too great for the least privileged groups. Note, in this regard, Parkin's observations on the strains generated within lower-class solidarism (F. Parkin, op. cit.), and the discussion of political mobilization in an urban context by C. Pickvance, op. cit.

39. A. Altshuler, *The City Planning Process* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1965).