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PRESSURE GROUPS

EDITED BY

JEREMY J. RICHARDSON

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INTRODUCTION

PRESSURE GROUPS AND GOVERNMENT

JEREMY J. RICHARDSON

DEFINITIONS

As Graham Wilson notes, one of the basic problems for interest group studies is the problem of definition.¹ He notes that a wide variety of organizations are described as interest groups or pressure groups and he, therefore, asks the question 'Are we to conclude that any organization which seeks to any degree to influence public policy is therefore to be regarded as an interest group?'² His approach is to 'rely on the requirements that interest groups be *organizations* which have some autonomy from government or political parties and that they try to influence policy'.³ In an earlier work we identified over twenty terms for what is essentially the same phenomenon—namely organizations pressing government to act (or not). Amongst the terms we discovered were: political group, lobby, political interest group, special interest group, organized group, voluntary association, pressure group, protective group, defensive group, anomic group, institutional group, associational group, non-associational group, formal-role group, exclusive group, and political group!⁴ As a working definition, we suggested the following: 'A pressure group may be regarded as any group which articulates demands that the political authorities in the political system or subsystem should make an authoritative allocation.'⁵ In order to exclude from this definition political parties and other groups whose objective is to take over the government, it is usual to add a note that such groups do not themselves seek to occupy the position of authority.⁵

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¹ Graham K. Wilson, *Interest Groups* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 6.

² *Ibid.* 7.

³ *Ibid.* 8.

⁴ Richard Kimber and Jeremy J. Richardson (eds.), *Pressure Groups in Britain* (London: Dent & Co., 1974), 1.

⁵ *Ibid.* 3.

THE FUNDAMENTAL IMPORTANCE OF INSTITUTIONS AND
INTERESTS

If we are not to live in anarchy, then we have to devise some means by which society can agree both on a set of institutions and processes by which laws and rules are to be decided and on those laws and rules which govern the workings of society at any one time. Both sets of decisions invariably give rise to conflict. This is because institutions and processes for deciding rules are not neutral in their effects. Different kinds of institutions and processes benefit or disbenefit different sectors of society. One only has to look at conflicts over rules in sport—and conflicts over the interpretation of the rules—to see that, in reality, there is no such thing as a 'level playing field'. The pitch itself may be flat, but the rules governing the playing of the game on that field can benefit one team or another. Similarly, a biased referee can assist one side in winning. Motor-racing is a classic example of a sport being contested both on the track and off it. As soon as a particular constructor develops an innovation which presents his/her team with an advantage, other constructors will lobby the sport's governing body to restrict the use of that innovation as giving an unfair advantage to one team, until they all have time to redesign their cars. Similarly, in the marketplace, it is increasingly common for manufacturers to press the state for new and tougher regulations, once they have invented a product or process which might give them a market advantage. For example, Volkswagen the German motor manufacturer, was very successful in 1990-1 in persuading the European Community to adopt Europe-wide emission standards based on catalytic converters. This gave VW an immediate market advantage over its competitors—such as Ford and Rover Group—who had been addressing the pollution problem via the so-called 'lean burn' technology. Their own costly investments were overtaken by the new regulations and they quickly had to develop their own catalytic converters.

Because rules and laws do matter (e.g. emission controls and the global warming problem, the safety of consumers, the rights of women, etc.), *institutions* matter also—because rules are decided via institutions. For nearly forty years in Political Science, it has been fashionable to de-emphasize the importance of institutions and to stress the importance of behaviour and processes. Yet more recently, the so-called 'new institutionalism' has re-emerged as a fashion in the discipline. As Johan P. Olsen argues,

An institutional perspective assumes that the organization of political life makes a difference. Political institutions are the building blocks of political

life. They influence available options for policy-making and for institutional change. They also influence the choices made among available options.⁶

In a telling passage Olsen draws our attention to a central feature of modern political institutions, of special relevance to the focus of this volume. Thus he notes that

contemporary formal organizations are not easily captured by distinctions between a private and public sphere, between hierarchies and markets, or by distinctions based on the legal status of organizations . . . government is often described . . . as a conglomerate of semi-federal, loosely allied organizations, each with a substantial life of its own, interacting with one another and interacting separately with civil groups.⁷

The reader only has to reflect on the importance of whether we live under a federal or unitary system of government, or under an executive or parliamentary dominated system, or under a multi-party or single-party system to realize that institutions do indeed 'matter'.

In focusing on the role of pressure or interest groups in this volume, we must always, therefore, be aware that different countries have quite different institutional structures and different sets of rules governing the internal working of these institutions. (For example, many Scandinavian democracies have a very open bureaucracy giving citizens free access to information—Britain has a very closed bureaucracy.) Pressure groups, of course, have played and continue to play a key role in the formation of these institutions, in the rules governing them and in the way that they change. To a considerable degree, the current institutional arrangements for governing any one country reflect the outcome of past battles between opposing pressure groups—they are the institutionalized peace treaties of past battles. Equally, the *existing* institutional arrangements are very difficult to change, without further battles, if only because 'agency capture' is quite common in all societies. Indeed, new agencies—such as state bodies created to reduce racial discrimination, encourage equal opportunities, counter unemployment, or deal with pollution—become the centre of whole industries consisting of the agency and its 'client' groups. Thus, old agencies, like old soldiers, rarely die. They and their clients have a strong self-interest in the survival and expansion of the agency.

⁶ Johan P. Olsen, 'Political Science and Organization Theory: Parallel Agendas but Mutual Disregard', in Roland M. Czada and A. Windhoff-Heritier (eds.), *Political Choice: Institutions, Rules, and the Limits of Rationality* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1991), 95.

⁷ *Ibid.* 96.

Thus whilst institutions do change—and new institutions are set up—the pressure group game at any one time is played out in the context of existing institutional structures and processes. For example, Italian groups must take account of the chronic instability of Italian government and of the importance of the Italian parliament. British groups must take account of the phenomenon of strong, centralized and stable government faced by a very weak yet well disciplined parliament. In the USA, pressure groups take account of (and exploit) the multiplicity of access points which is so characteristic of the American system of government—the Presidency, the bureaucracy, both Houses of Congress, the powerful Congressional Committees, the Judiciary and state and local government. In contrast, in the former Soviet Union and newly democratized Eastern bloc countries, one institution which was hitherto absolutely central—the Communist Party—has all but disappeared from the landscape, leaving an institutional vacuum which is often at the centre of the new group struggle. A similar example of institutional change was in France when the Fifth Republic was set up in 1958. There was then a major shift in the locus of power moving France from a parliamentary dominated system of government to a presidential system. Like a weather vane when the wind changes, pressure group activity quickly adjusted to the new institutional arrangements. These new arrangements were, however, of benefit to certain kinds of groups—particularly those professional and business interests having good contacts with the bureaucracy—and were disadvantageous to those groups having stronger contacts with the French Assembly—such as farmers and trade unions.

We must also note, as Robert Salisbury has argued, that institutions are not always *governmental* institutions. In a seminal paper, he has argued that interest group theory has focused too heavily on interest groups (along with political parties) as part of the articulation–aggregation process in society. In contrast he argues that *non-governmental institutions* have ‘come to dominate the process of interest representation in American national politics’.⁸ He makes a central distinction between an institution and an interest group by arguing that ‘institutions have interests that are politically and analytically independent of the interest of particular institutional members’.⁹ The types of institutions with which he is concerned include think-tanks, corporations, local governments, churches, and even universities. He concludes that the importance

⁸ Robert Salisbury, ‘Interest Representation: The Dominance of Institutions’, *American Political Science Review*, 78 (1984), 64.

⁹ *Ibid.* 68.

of institutional representation has significant implications for public policy, as ‘institutional representation may be expected to be a more durable or persistent in policymaking circles than most purposive groups or even membership groups based on material incentives’.¹⁰ Finally, he warns that much of the conservative bias which writers such as Schattschneider¹¹ have identified in the American system is more due to the activities of institutional representation than it is of ordinary membership groups.¹²

In practice, public policy in all societies is probably decided as a result of a complex and often unpredictable interplay between governmental institutions, non-governmental institutions (of the type analysed by Salisbury) and conventional membership groups which have been the main attention of pressure group studies so far. As Walker warns us, however, it would be wrong to see public policy as solely an outcome of group pressure. Thus, in considering the American interest group system, he suggests that,

A pressure model of the policymaking process in which an essentially passive legislature responds to petitions from groups of citizens who have spontaneously organized because of common social or economic concerns must yield to a model in which influences for change come as much from inside government as from beyond its institutional boundaries, and in which political entrepreneurs operating from bases in interest groups, from within the Congress, the presidency, or many private institutions, struggle to accommodate citizen discontent, appeal to emerging groups, and strive to generate support for their own conceptions of the public interest.¹³

Walker’s observation suggests that we also need to address the range of *interests* that are involved in the processes of governing society. For any one issue or policy problem, we can usually identify a wide range of actors who have a very direct interest—in the sense that they stand to gain or lose significantly by the decision. These actors can be politicians whose electoral fortunes may be affected, bureaucrats whose career opportunities and budgets may be affected, private institutions, such as churches and universities, conventional membership interest groups—and, of course, citizens. Each policy problem, as it reaches the agenda, brings with it a whole *constellation of interests* who then engage in political activity in order to ensure that the processing of that issue is to their advantage. Indeed, the very agenda-setting process is often at the centre of the power

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 75.

¹¹ E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist’s View of Democracy in America* (New York: Holt, 1960).

¹² Salisbury, ‘Interest Representation’, 75.

¹³ Jack L. Walker, ‘The Origins and Maintenance of Interest Groups in America’, *American Political Science Review*, 77 (1983), 403.

struggle in society with pressure groups playing a central role in the struggles to attract the attention of decision-makers and the public at large. As Schattschneider has suggested, determining what politics is actually about is perhaps the supreme exercise of political power.¹⁴ Equally, influencing what politics is *not* about is the focus of much activity. If we see public policies as in some sense the equilibrium of the various struggles over issues which have reached the agenda, then we should not be surprised to learn that those pressure groups and other interests in society who are *benefiting* from existing public policies have no desire to see the issue reopened for discussion. For example, farmers in all Western democracies have, historically, achieved very favourable public policies which distribute benefits to them at the expense of consumers. Farmers have, therefore, been very active in trying to prevent non-agricultural groups from participating in the making of agricultural policy, for fear that this would open up the whole question of agricultural subsidies for debate. Indeed, over time, this is just what has happened as environmentalists, food health groups and even taxpayers have begun to demand participation in the processes by which agricultural policies are determined. Grenson's classic study of 'non-decision-making' compared two American cities with similar air pollution problems—Gary and East Chicago in Indiana—yet which exhibited marked differences in the way that they dealt with them. It was not until the mid-1950s that air pollution became a public issue in Gary, yet East Chicago passed an ordinance relating to air pollution in 1949. The explanation, according to Grenson, is that industrial interests in Gary were more influential in preventing air pollution from becoming an issue than were industrialists in East Chicago.¹⁵

At the theoretical level, power theorists have introduced the concepts of two (and subsequently, three) faces of power. Bachrach and Baratz argue that by concentrating on decisions, we are ignoring a vital element in the power structure—the power not to make decisions in given policy areas. Thus, 'power is exercised when A participates in decisions that affect B' but it is 'also exercised when A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to A'.¹⁶

¹⁴ Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People*.

¹⁵ M. Grenson, *The Un-Politics of Air Pollution* (Baltimore, Mo.: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971).

¹⁶ P. Bachrach and M. S. Baratz, *Power and Poverty: Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 7.

The agricultural case, cited above, may be an example of a much broader modern phenomenon, identified in 1978 by Hugh Hecló in the United States. At that time it was conventional wisdom to see American politics as dominated by so-called 'Iron Triangles' of public bureaucracies, congressional committees, and pressure groups. Yet he identified a trend in American politics which lead to an important qualification of this simple but convenient model. Thus he emphasized the fact that the number of participants in the policy process has increased considerably over time, eroding the rather closed system of decision-making (which in Britain we identified as the private management of public business),¹⁷ and transforming it into a system of issue networks. Hecló argued that, 'Looking for the closed triangles of control, we tend to overlook the fairly open networks of people that increasingly impinge upon government'.¹⁸ He warned that, with increasing complexity, it has become more difficult to identify 'leaders' in policy areas.

This phenomenon—essentially a tendency for policy-making to become more complex and less predictable because of the widening of participation—can possibly be traced back to the increased mobilization of *interests* in society. Indeed, McFarlane sees Hecló's issue networks as yet another example of the emergence of countervailing power to limit the excesses of existing (usually producer) groups.¹⁹ As people become more educated, articulate, and wealthier, and as knowledge and information become more widespread, more people come to recognize their own interests in issues which hitherto they were happy to ignore and leave to others to resolve. Thus, new interests are constantly being formed in society, to press for policy change. There are two very spectacular examples of this process in all Western democracies since the 1970s: the rise of environmentalists and of women's groups. The origins of these two movements are rather different. In the case of the environmentalists, the emergence of new and more vociferous organized pressure groups is linked to the progress of scientific discovery. Once scientists discover more about the effects of certain processes—e.g. the burning of carbon fuels, the emission of waste gases by cars, the use of artificial fertilizers, or the effects of smoking, then so either completely new groups are formed or existing groups

¹⁷ Jeremy J. Richardson and A. G. Jordan, *Governing Under Pressure: The Policy Process in a Post-Parliamentary Democracy* (Oxford: Martin Robertson & Co., 1979).

¹⁸ Hugh Hecló, 'Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment', in A. King (ed.), *The New American Political System* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1978), 88.

¹⁹ Andrew S. McFarlane, 'Interest Groups and Theories of Power in America', *British Journal of Political Science*, 17 (1987), 146.

become more active. As a result of this mobilization of groups, the existing policy area becomes 'overcrowded' and it becomes much more difficult to agree on policy outcomes or solutions. In a different policy area—health—Fritschler's study of smoking and politics in the USA is now a classic study of this process at work. He concludes that

The tobacco subsystem was changed completely in eight years. The small group of people in Congress, in the agencies, and in the tobacco groups lost control of the policymaking processes. As they did, very remarkable changes in public policy occurred . . . The new tobacco subsystem is likely to be a much different one from that which preceded it and was powerful until the early 1960s.²⁰

Essentially, new participants entered the policy-making arena because they began to recognize that they had a direct *interest* in the policy process which determined the regulation of the tobacco industry. The rise of women's groups is rather different as it is difficult to relate this to the scientific and technological developments in society. The phenomenon appears to be more to do with a developing consciousness and awareness amongst women worldwide—literally, a (belated) recognition by women that they too had an *interest* in many public policies (and in securing new public policies) which previously had been ignored or left to men. Thus, despite the concern expressed earlier by those theorists concerned with non-decision-making, we might take some reassurance from the relevance of *interest* in all human activity. This was recognized by David Truman, writing about the USA, as long ago as 1951. In his *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion* he introduced the very useful concept of 'potential group'. He observed that if a disequilibrium occurs in society, new groups may form in order to restore the balance. For Truman, this was a very important aspect of group politics 'especially if a considerable number of individuals is affected, since these new groups are likely to utilize political means of achieving their objectives. They are likely to become political groups although they need not do so'.²¹ He cited a number of instances of this phenomenon at work—for example, farm movements throughout American history have developed during times of economic difficulties such as the 1870s and early 1920s. He also cites examples from simpler (*sic*) societies such as New Guinea, as follows:

²⁰ A. Lee Fritschler, *Smoking and Politics: Policymaking and the Federal Bureaucracy* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969), 152.

²¹ David B. Truman (1951), *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion* (New York: Knopf, 1951), 31.

When government officials and missionaries arrived in the Papua Territory, New Guinea, in the 1920s, they attempted to alter the ways of the natives and particularly to keep them from holding some of their customary religious ceremonies. The resulting disturbance in the established patterns of interaction was followed by the development of a series of religious movements that spread over New Guinea.²²

Much later, in 1980, James Q. Wilson, having studied the regulatory process in the USA, also emphasized the role of countervailing interests in the policy process. The regulatory process was not entirely dominated by economic producer interests, as many had believed. Both producer interest and countervailing interests played a significant role in influencing the type of regulation adopted.²³ In a sophisticated reformulation of Wilson's ideas in terms of a 'power triad', McFarland has identified five elements derived from Wilson's analysis of the regulatory process, as follows:

1. the government policy process may be viewed in terms of specific areas of policies;
2. economic producer groups (abbreviated as P) normally organize to lobby government agency policy-makers in the area of production;
3. but countervailing groups (abbreviated as CV) will also be normally organized to oppose some of the interests of P;
4. state agencies are normally assumed to have a significant degree of autonomy (abbreviated by P or by CV);
5. this power triad is assumed to be a basic analytical unit, which is then complicated by adding such factors as legislators, presidential policy-makers, and the judiciary.²⁴

McFarland also points to the emergence of social movements as a source of countervailing power. As he notes, resource mobilization theory is a combination of interest group theory with the sociologists' interest in mass behaviour: 'This theory posits a supply of "movement entrepreneurs", eager to gain influence and social position through the management of social movement organizations (SMOs) to further some cause or other. Many of these become lobbies, and thus a fertile source of countervailing groups.'²⁵ Interestingly, McFarland also echoes Truman's earlier work, cited above, when he suggests that another source of countervailing power 'results from the public recognition that elite control of a sub-system

²² *Ibid.* 32.

²³ James Q. Wilson, *The Politics of Regulation* (New York: Basic Books, 1980).

²⁴ Amended from McFarland, 'Interest Groups and Theories of Power', 146.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 145.

has got out of hand, which in American vocabulary is called "special interest power".²⁶

Before we turn to a discussion of another major feature of pressure group politics—the routinization of contacts between pressure groups and government—it is useful to remind ourselves that we are discussing a *dynamic* system. Many of the contributions in this volume point to a process of change in the system of government/group relations. It is important not to lose sight of the possibility of change in the balance of power between government and groups and between groups. We need look no further than the march of regulation in the modern state for evidence of this truth. Over the past thirty years, every Western democracy has witnessed a tightening of the regulatory grip by the state. Thus, for example, we have better consumer protection, better environmental protection, better safety protection for workers, and better regulation of workers' rights and conditions. All of these have been achieved via a shift in the balance of power between groups. Even the fashion for 'deregulation' in the 1980s and 1990s has actually seen much re-regulation, designed to protect the consumer from the adverse effects of the (now fashionable) market forces unleashed by deregulation.

REGULARIZING THE RELATIONS BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS AND GROUPS

Much of the preceding discussion has been designed to convince the reader of the centrality of groups in society. Whether we call them pressure groups, interest groups, or lobbies makes relatively little difference to the actual phenomenon under discussion—namely, the processes by which *interests* become *organized* in society and the processes by which those organizations participate in public policy-making.

As the passage from Bentley reproduced in this volume suggests, much of the 'stuff' of governing is to do with the management of the interface between governments and groups. Indeed pre-democratic governance had as one of its central features the bargaining between government and barons. This has continued throughout the processes and barons. This has continued throughout the processes of industrialization, democratization, and especially in post-industrial societies where we have possibly seen the final stages in interest mobilization. Pressure groups are the new barons with

²⁶ Amended from McFarland, 'Interest Groups and Theories of Power', 146.

which governments have to deal. In this latter stage, interests which were previously ignored or were unorganized have mobilized to a degree which often equals that of traditional producer groups. Thus, the existence of groups is a constraint on governmental action in all political systems. The institutions, structures, and processes of intermediation between groups and government vary considerably, as the subsequent chapters in this volume demonstrate. Yet the process of governing societies always involves some accommodation of the wishes of pressure and interest groups, even in totalitarian systems.

Indeed, one of the surprising aspects of pressure group studies is the frequency with which authors describe their own national systems as almost unique! In practice, the similarities between nations in the way that their governments manage the interface with groups in the policy process are striking—especially in Western Europe. One of the best researched European studies is that conducted by Johan P. Olsen and his colleagues in Bergen, Norway. Drawing on the results of the now famous Norwegian 'power project' they conclude that, despite the fact that styles of mobilization and confrontation will occur in the Norwegian political system from time to time, the main tendency will still be peaceful coexistence and revolution in slow motion. In their view:

The Norwegian situation will be influenced by a long tradition of political compromises; by the fact that most (but not all) interests are organised; by the willingness of ad hoc groups to avoid violence; and by a certain ability to adapt political institutions to new circumstances. Certainly, there are limits to what can be achieved through organisational means, but those limits are not given.²⁷

Much earlier, another Norwegian political scientist, Stein Rokkan, produced an analysis of Norwegian democracy that has now been generalized to capture the essence of democracy in Western Europe as a whole. In what may have originally appeared to be a rather esoteric comment, seemingly highly specific to Norway, he wrote as follows:

the crucial decisions on economic policy are rarely taken in the parties or in Parliament: the central area is the bargaining table where the government authorities meet directly with the trade union leaders, the representatives of the farmers, the smallholders and the fishermen, and the delegates of the Employers' Association. These yearly rounds of negotiations have in fact

²⁷ Johan P. Olsen, Paul Roness, and Harald Saetren, 'Norway: Still Peaceful Coexistence and Revolution in Slow Motion?', in Jeremy J. Richardson (ed.), *Policy Styles in Western Europe* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1932), 76.

come to mean more in the lives of rank-and-file citizens than formal elections.²⁸

In fact this captures the essence of European democracy—the so-called ‘co-optation’ of groups into the policy process in which the interrelationship between groups and government, depending on the policy area or issue, can often be of greater significance for policy outcomes than elections. Martin Hessler and Robert Kvavik have summarized what they term the ‘European Polity’ as follows:

We would emphasise as a characteristic of the European polity a common denominator of all polities . . . a decision-making structure characterized by continuous, regularized access for economically, politically, ethnically, and/or subculturally based groups to the highest levels of the political system, i.e. the decision-making subsystem.²⁹

As they correctly suggest, most European countries have had some experience with the co-optive arrangements of the sort outlined for Norway, even though variations occur in the level and extent and the formal structures of co-optation. Despite these variations, they observe that ‘The dominant pattern [of co-optation] consists of the emergence of commissions, permanent and ad hoc, as extensions of the formal government bureaucracy’.³⁰ They also emphasize both the *institutionalization* of this process and the cross-cutting linkages within it. Thus,

by viewing the decision-making structure in the European polity as a linkage structure, we wish to convey a picture of an established, vigorously structured—perhaps even institutionalised . . . entity. The decision-making subsystem that characterises the European polity is in no way ad hoc. It underpins the ‘elite cartel’ with massive bureaucratic infrastructures, comprised not only of the governmental administration formally viewed (i.e. the civil service), but of the numerous . . . commissions and committees as well. Inasmuch as the rule sets that comprise the decision-making subsystem are so numerous, diverse, and broadly encompassing (of the society as a whole), the linkage structure forms a substantial segment of the overall political structure in the European polity.³¹

As Grant Jordan’s contribution to this volume indicates, so far-reaching is the system of group co-optation in Europe that for much

²⁸ Stein Rokkan, ‘Numerical Democracy and Corporate Pluralism’, in R. A. Dahl (ed.), *Political Opposition in Western Democracies* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press), 164.

²⁹ Martin O. Hessler and Robert B. Kvavik, ‘Patterns of European Politics: The European Polity’, in Martin O. Hessler (ed.), *Politics in Europe: Structures and Processes in Some Postindustrial Democracies* (New York: David McKay & Co., 1974), 48.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 63.

³¹ *Ibid.* 66.

of the 1970s and 1980s there was a growing literature on the corporatist ‘tendencies’ of the European model. Looking back on that debate, it seems that the proponents of the corporatist model (as the most accurate description of the European polity) were mistaken. Even one of its main advocates—Philippe Schmitter—has now reformulated his analysis.

The original core description of corporatism by Schmitter listed its main features as follows: ‘the constituents’ units . . . organised into a limited number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories . . .’.³² This corporatist model was, of course, in sharp contrast to the pluralist American literature of the 1950s and 1960s which had emphasized the open, competitive, disaggregated, and essentially democratic nature of the policy process. The corporatist model was an ideal type and it was never found in the wild! Writing over a decade later, in the context of a discussion of the possibility of *neo-corporatism* at the level of the European Community, Schmitter and his colleague, Wolfgang Streeck, admitted that there had been a

decay of national corporatism in the late 1970s and in the 1980s (that) was rooted in domestic developments like qualitative changes in social structures, in the economy, and in domestic political systems that had imperceptibly at first eaten away at corporatism’s structural and perhaps cultural foundations.³³

They conclude that a combination of three trends was important: increasing differentiation of social structures and collective interests in advanced capitalist societies; market instability and volatility and pressures on firms to increase ‘flexibility’ of their product ranges, technologies and social organization; and changing roles and structures of interest organizations. In combination these trends apparently add ‘to the reasons why a restoration of neocorporatism at either national or supranational level has become unlikely now and in the future’.³⁴ They see the processes of intermediation at the European level as moving towards an American pattern of ‘disjointed pluralism’ or ‘competitive federalism’ organized over three levels: regions, nation-states, and ‘Brussels’. Thus, ‘as in the United States and perhaps more so, this system would be

³² Philippe C. Schmitter, ‘Still the Century of Corporatism?’, in G. Lehbruch and P. Schmitter (eds.), *Trends Towards Corporatist Intermediation* (London: Sage), 13, also quoted by Jordan later in this volume.

³³ Wolfgang Streeck and Philippe C. Schmitter, ‘From National Corporatism to Transnational Pluralism: Organized Interests in the Single European Market’, *Politics & Society*, 19/2 (1991), 146.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

characterised by a profound absence of hierarchy and monopoly among a wide variety of players of different but uncertain status'.³⁵ At the Euro-level at least, the picture they paint is unrecognizable from Schmitter's original definition (and prediction) of corporatism. Now there is 'no mechanism in sight that could rationalize its political system, help crystallize its *mélange* of actors and processes, and establish corporatist monopolies of representation, interassociational hierarchies or for that matter, a predominant position for the (EC) Commission's hierarchy and technology'.³⁶ Could anything be further from the 'limited number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered, and functionally differentiated categories' as the core elements of corporatism cited above? Even at the national level, Schmitter now appears pessimistic about the chances of corporatism. Thus, he now believes that 'especially when viewed from the macro- or national-level, it (corporatism) looks too small in scale to be of much help in the restructuring of sectoral and regional patterns'.³⁷ Finally, he concedes that 'There are many ways of handling these problems of conflicting interest and policy compromise in capitalist societies and none is a priori necessarily more efficient than others.'³⁸

We may conclude, then, on this theme of a *multiplicity* of patterns of state-group relations. They vary from state to state, from policy sector to policy sector, and over time. In an attempt to disaggregate general models of state-group relations, Atkinson and Coleman suggest that, by concentrating on the sectoral level of the policy process, we may more effectively capture the nuances of the specific bureaucratic arrangements and the relationships with key societal actors. Thus, they conclude that policy networks 'may take in a variety of forms and hence their study requires a more nuanced categorization than the strong-weak state or pluralist-corporatist formulations'.³⁹ They also conclude that the relative frequency of different types of policy networks will 'vary systematically across democratic polities depending on the macropolitical institutions'.⁴⁰ Gerhard Lehmbruch has also emphasized the *variation* in 'standard

³⁵ Philippe C. Schmitter, 159. See also Mazey and Richardson in this volume, and S. P. Mazey and Jeremy J. Richardson, 'Interest Groups and European Integration' (forthcoming).

³⁶ Streeck and Schmitter, 'From National Corporatism', 159.

³⁷ Philippe C. Schmitter, 'Corporatism is Dead! Long Live Corporatism!', *Government & Opposition*, 24/1 (1989), 72.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 67.

³⁹ Michael M. Atkinson and William D. Coleman, 'Strong States and Weak States: Sectoral Policy Networks in Advanced Capitalist Economies', *British Journal of Political Science*, 19 (1989), 66.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 67.

operating procedures'.⁴¹ For example, he suggests that 'the degree to which the participation of organized interests in general is considered legitimate varies considerably'.⁴² He identifies a number of factors which may produce differences in national approaches to interest group intermediation, including the degree of discretion which the bureaucracy has in determining whether and whom to consult and the degree of sectoral segmentation.⁴³ He concludes that future research needs to address what he terms the 'configurative' aspect of interest intermediation. This is 'a structure made up of complex linkages between organizations, agencies, and other institutions . . .'. He sees the policy network concept, cited above (see also the chapter on Britain in this volume) as of the greatest potential in identifying cross-national variations in the intermediation process.

The main purpose of this brief volume, therefore, is to sketch for students these macro-political institutions in their broad characteristics and in terms of their relationship to national and sometimes transnational interest group systems. In selecting our contributions, we have tried to include both a theoretical perspective and a wide range of political systems. One overriding theme emerges, however. Despite structural differences in political systems—for example, contrast the US, Australian, German, and Canadian federal systems, with unitary systems like Britain, Denmark, and France—and despite differing degrees of interest organization, it is clear from this volume that as Bentley put it in 1908, the 'process of government' is centrally concerned with managing the vast variety of groups which exist in modern societies in such a way as to secure stability and a reasonable level of consensus. At its most basic, the task of government is to hold societies together. In practice this is possible only if the major sections of society are somehow 'accommodated'. If these interests are excluded from the policy process then society itself is threatened.

⁴¹ See A. G. Jordan and Jeremy J. Richardson, 'The British Policy Style or the Logic of Negotiation?', in Jeremy J. Richardson (ed.), *Policy Styles in Western Europe* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), 81.

⁴² Gerhard Lehmbruch, 'The Organization of Society, Administrative Strategies and Policy Networks: Elements of a Developmental Theory of Interest Systems', in Roland M. Czada and A. Windhoff-Heritier (eds.), *Political Choice: Institutions, Rules and the Limits of Rationality* (Frankfurt, Campus Verlag, 1991), 123.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 124.