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THEORISING ORGANISATIONAL POWER  
AND POLITICS

by

Edward David Clark, B.Sc.

Submitted for the Degree of Ph.D.  
at the University of Glasgow in  
1978.

ERRATA

There are three page-numbering errors in this final copy:

- 1) The text moves from p.86 to p.89 without the intervening numbers.
- 2) Two consecutive pages are numbered 215 (the second of the pages becomes 215(a) ).
- 3) There is no page numbered 277.

These purely numbering errors in no way affect the text itself.

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## SUMMARY

This thesis aims to construct a sensitising framework of concepts and propositions in order to establish foundations for an interpretive sociological understanding of the process of politics in formal organisational arenas. In doing so, it seeks to consider and discuss some broader issues and problems which have engaged the recent interest of general sociologists, but which have been more or less neglected by practitioners in the organisational sub-field. A detailed critical examination of the "politics-related" literature reveals the tacit existence of three types of approach to the topic, none of which provides a sufficient grounding for the sociological study of organisational power and politics.

The weaknesses of existing contributions are shown to lie as much in their dominant methodology of theorising as in the latter's content, and it is therefore imperative to clarify certain methodological matters before progressing very far. It is in fact argued that, in order to comply with the demands of the theoretical assumptions underlying this thesis, the academic activity of theorising must be sensitising rather than definitive.

In spite of their various shortcomings, the prominent theories in the area offer important clues as to the nature of power and politics, and these clues are transformed into three conceptual themes - of order-conflict, of possibilities-impossibilities and of the two faces of power - which act as analytical points of reference for the development of a sensitising framework. To explore the pivotal characteristic of the interpretive sociological approach to political action, viz. the subjective meaningfulness of such action, discussion focuses primarily upon participants' everyday theorising activities which, through their interpretive and strategic functions, mediate between the objective social world of organisational life and the observable process of organisational power and politics.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The state of any sub-field is inextricably linked to the state of its embracing discipline, and some sub-fields are in the vanguard of the latter's general development while others follow, often reluctantly, in its wake. The variations in this relationship between sub-fields and general discipline have not, to my knowledge, been examined, but most sociologists could intuitively rate their own specialisms on a scale from (say) "progressive" to "recalcitrant". It has been my continuing experience that, in spite of the growing number of sociologists involved in this area, in spite of the generous and increasing supply of organisational studies and theories, the sociology of organisations not only has been relatively impervious to developments in general sociological debate, but also constitutes an area of research which, at this stage in its evolution, remains largely unsociological<sup>1</sup> in perspective and in imagination.

The reasons for this latter state of affairs are no doubt complicated, but it certainly is not accidental. Historically, the sociology of organisations was created by a mid-twentieth century convergence of interests between management theory and industrial sociology, but there is little doubt that the former "parent" has wielded the greatest and most lasting influence. 'Organisation theory' or 'organisational analysis' are often used as synonymous with or equivalent to the 'sociology of organisations', indicating that sociologists tend to consider their projects as interdisciplinary rather than sociological. Interdisciplinary work is not to be decried, but neither should its limitations be concealed. Of especial significance in the predominance of unsociological research in organisations, is the eclecticism of interdisciplinary studies (see 3.2.4) and their prescriptive nature - the latter feature obviously reflecting the influence of managerial interests in the area.

The relative insularity of the sociology of organisations is illustrated by the fact that even the most fiery and persistent of theoretical debates tend to go unnoticed - anyway, unnoted - in the organisational context. The major issues of power, of order and change, of consensus and conflict, of structure (system) and action have roused relatively little interest among organisational sociologists - if we are to take their research and reports as indicative of their interest. Organisations are more or less defined as "systems" or "structures" of authority and control, but rarely are the sociological implications of this feature explored, either theoretically or empirically. The treatment of 'power' as an organisational issue is at times pitiful: the confusion of power and authority; the faulty extrapolation of how power actually works from the formal (i.e. organisation chart) knowledge of how it should work<sup>2</sup>; the obsession with typologies of power and authority rather than with theorising them; the banal discussions of leadership traits and styles. At its worst, these are the ingredients of an alleged "sociological" analysis of organisational "power".

In this thesis I shall be examining the existing sociological analysis of organisational power "at its best", and it will become clear that there is still much work to do in order to establish even foundations for the study of this topic. With the exception of a few notable studies (see Chapter Three), the failure to realise the potential of the concept of power has been paralleled by the failure to consider *how* power is used, and the processes through which power enters into the organisational process. In short, the sociology of organisations has seriously neglected the *political* dimension of organisational life. While other social units, ranging from society as an abstract system to the family as a concrete group, have been investigated by sociologists, political scientists and social anthropologists as "political" entities, there has been an implicit resistance to the interpretation of work organisations in particular, and formal organisations in general, in this light. The view that organisational politics concern "... irregularities, backdoor deals, and subtle blackmail..." (Crozier, 1964, p.106) or the "dirty linen aspect" (Mouzelis, 1975, p.159) of organisational life appears to be

common even among those sociologists who enthusiastically advocate the study of power in organisations.<sup>3</sup> The impression is evidently that politics are abnormal and fleeting events, rather than a normal, patterned, constitutive social process in formal organisations. This myopic view may consolidate the (self) images of those who exercise power in organisations, but the task of the sociologist is to take his topic "seriously" and not to be distracted by prevailing ideologies. Indeed, the power of the latter must themselves become a topic for sociological scrutiny.

In order to study organisational politics seriously, it is above all necessary to overcome the insularity of the sub-field of organisational sociology. First, those concepts, propositions, issues and debates which arise in general sociology and in other areas of research, need to inform the broad theoretical tone of the approach; second, organisational power and politics must be considered in the context of social life in general, so that, specifically in Part Three, it is essential to avoid the tendency to compartmentalise the two arenas. These two injunctions are, of course, mutually reinforcing.

In this Introductory Chapter I have three objectives which must be accomplished before the real work can commence. First, and most importantly, it is necessary to outline the major assumptions which underpin the thesis, the latter's theoretical scope, and the general themes which structure the approach that I shall be advocating. Second, I shall briefly discuss some conventional views of power and authority and the issues that are raised in their conceptualisation. This will not only set the conceptual scene for the thesis (particularly Part One) and preview some of the theoretical problems in this area of research; it will also prevent the possibility of confusion during the thesis when reference to these ideas is necessary, but when their explication would be lengthy and distracting. I shall conclude the chapter with the traditional outline of the structure of the thesis, set in the context of the assumptions and themes that will have been introduced.

## 1.1. Voluntarism, Power and Politics

### 1.1.1 The Postulate of Voluntarism

One of the major debates in sociology of recent years has been over the relative strengths and weaknesses of the structural and interpretive theoretical positions. The debate over these "two sociologies" (cf. Dawe, 1970; also, for example, Cohen, 1968 and Silverman, 1970<sup>4</sup>) and their respective lines on philosophical, methodological and sociological issues, is of real importance for comprehending recent theoretical contributions, and it is crucial for the arguments below to make clear my own position regarding this debate. I do not think that it is sensible to "side" wholly with one position or the other, but the fundamental assumption which guides my theorising places it more or less in the interpretive camp.

In general, structuralism asserts that sociology should be concerned with the discovery of global patterns (structures) which provide an overall picture of the way social units work and what they are like. This requires the surrendering of more "local" information (e.g. about individual or social groups) which add little to the overall picture. The causes and consequences of these structures should also be seen in global terms; causes are best conceived as "external" constraints on human behaviour, shaping the latter independently so as to create the observed patterns of social interaction.<sup>5</sup>

My commitment to an interpretive sociological approach is directly related to my belief that social action must be explained in terms of the subjective meanings which actors *themselves* attach to their behaviour. This view derives from Weber's classic definition of the nature and scope of sociology (Weber, 1964, p.88ff.), and is not particularly controversial in itself. Structuralists themselves usually concede that subjective meanings *are* the immediate 'causal' factors in individual social action, but would suggest that they are intangible and impossible or too difficult to study empirically,<sup>6</sup>

and that, even if they could be understood, the information they provide is too "local" to be of any great use in explaining general patterns.

Structural factors and subjective meanings are *both* important in sociological explanation, but the latter have a *prior* significance because they are the immediate "causes" of the actual courses of action chosen by actors. The (interpretive) process of choice is not independent of "external" factors - unless it were "unrealistic" - but it cannot be assumed that actors will act directly (i.e. without subjective mediation) in response to structural 'stimuli'. The assumption concerning the prior significance of subjective meanings can be called the "postulate of voluntarism", and it implies

"... that the relationship between action and social phenomena which precede it is always mediated by the actor's interpretation of the phenomena. In this sense, action is voluntary so that, strictly speaking, the actor is never propelled in any particular direction by external conditions in themselves." (Clarke, 1975, p.3).

Where sociologists seek social structure and its "external" causes, without considering the interpretive work of social actors, the approach may be called "deterministic", and the results of the approach are heavily biased towards the overall stability of social patterns. Such a structuralism treats deviations from the general pattern (i.e. where actors behave "unpredictably" with respect to external constraint) as insignificant relative to the overall pattern itself, and fails to distinguish between various possible reasons why actors are apparently "propelled in a particular direction by external conditions". However the intended and unintended consequences of "deviations" may under certain circumstances become forces for structural change, rather than "deviations from order", whereas the implicitly assumed routine "support" for the system may be highly precarious. With such omissions, due to the failure to study interpretive work, the weight of structuralist presumption

favours stability and order, and rules out, as sociologically "uninteresting", potentialities for social change.

On the other hand, the postulate of voluntarism, which obliges the sociologist to examine subjective meanings as a priority, is associated with an approach that treats social patterns as *socially contingent*. The effects of structural factors *qua* "external constraints", and hence subsequent behavioural outcomes, are dependent upon how social actors make sense of, and act upon their interpretations of, the factors in question. As a result stability and order are always potentially vulnerable, since global social patterns or structures are subject to processes of subjectively meaningful social action. Concerning order and change, interpretive sociology has no internally determined preference, because both social states - indeed all empirically possible states - are created by social actors whose variable 'interpretive schemes' are the primary focus of enquiry.

These arguments will be elaborated during the thesis, but the preliminary points are as follows. The present theoretical effort is based upon the postulate of voluntarism, which implies that social (organisational) reality be analysed as socially contingent rather than externally determined (see also Chapter Five); it also implies, as a matter of priority - *not* of exclusiveness - that social (organisational) life, including its 'political' aspects, be understood in terms of the interpretive work ("everyday theorising": see especially Chapters Eight and Nine) of actors living through and hence sustaining (or not) the social (organisational) process.

#### 1.1.2 Power and Politics in Formal Organisations

Taking further this broad distinction between structural and interpretive sociology, it has been argued by structuralists that concentration on the interpretive work of social actors not only tends to "miss" the broad patterns of social life by becoming overwhelmed with local details - as suggested above - but also places too much emphasis on human "choice". This stress in turn gives social

life an image of a "free-floating" process, in which people "do their own thing" independent of constraint (cf. Martin, 1977, p.32).

The study of *power in formal organisation* provides a peculiarly apposite context in which to consider this theoretical issue viz. the role of constraint in interpretive sociology. 'Power' is seen by many as a constraining social force *par excellence*. As a concept, it responds to the need to incorporate in a theoretical framework what Dahl has called a "primitive notion", the essence of which is referred to by White (1972) as the "significant affecting" of courses of social action. During the exercise of power, the person(s) whose behaviour is being "affected" will usually, though not necessarily, experience the situation as constraining.<sup>7</sup>

The 'formal organisation'<sup>8</sup> is usually portrayed as a social unit or arena which, by virtue of its defined characteristics, places inescapable constraints on its participants. It is conceived as an internally disciplined, highly structured entity which is ordered by an imposed system of hierarchical relationships and made to work by the socially constraining influence of authority and other more impersonal processes of control. Not surprisingly, the sociology of organisations has, until recently, been dominated by structural analysis (or variants of it, e.g. systems theory, socio-technicism) which acquires its plausibility through examining these "obvious" characteristics as external, determining constraints.

I do not suggest that power and formal organisations are not socially constraining - to do so would be to undermine the credibility of this thesis before it starts. However the structural postulate of constraint as an externally determining force contravenes, for whatever reason (e.g. convenience, heuristic simplification), what we know about how social action is generated. An interpretive sociological analysis of power in organisations requires that the postulates of constraint and of voluntarism be reconciled, but only by giving prior explanatory significance to the latter. This will involve the reformulation of the process of "significant affecting" and of the concept of "organisation structure", so that constraint is not understood naively as an unmediated external force.

An adequate view of power is a prerequisite in any attempt to understand political process. As White (1972) has argued in a general context

"... a statement about the actual or possible components of power to some extent constitutes or implies a statement of some actual or possible components of politics" (White, 1972, p.481).

Power and politics are thus closely intertwined both as topics and as concepts. In this thesis I shall refer to the political process in organisations - which is constituted by political actions - as organisational politics. As a general statement, to act as an introductory reference point, I consider organisational politics as those related sequences of social (inter)actions in which organisational participants exercise power with and against one another with the purpose of influencing significant (to them) aspects of organisational life. In short organisational politics are a social process *internal* to the organisation.<sup>9</sup>

Politics may be analysed in two ways, with respect to both the intentions or purposes of political acts, and, relatedly, to their consequences for organisational life. In Part Three, I shall be interested in both facets. At one level, politics comprise political actions, which may be comprehended as subjectively meaningful courses of action followed by participants who, as individuals, groups, departments, or even as the organisation, attempt to control their own organisational lives. As a process of social interaction, this will involve loosening or evading the constraints imposed by other participants (individuals, groups etc.) and/or tightening or imposing constraints on others. Political action is therefore one kind of socially-mediated behaviour in an organisational context in which power and constraint are exercised, although not always in an overt manner.

Political actions may in turn be conceived as component "parts" of the social process I am calling organisational politics.

This process is not arrived at by a simple 'aggregation' of political actions, meanings, intentions etc., but results from the intended *and* unintended consequences of successful *and* unsuccessful attempts to control, in varying degrees, work and life in the organisational arena. The *consequences* of this network of political actions are equally important, sociologically, as the intentions, because the two will mostly diverge. Political action, by intent or consequence, shapes, sustains, adapts and changes the 'structure' of the organisation, and the examination of such action as subjectively meaningful to participants allows the interpretive sociological approach to account for all these possibilities.

### 1.1.3 Theorising Organisational Power and Politics

Both academics interested in studying and explaining organisational politics, and participants whose lives and actions are interwoven in those processes, engage in interpretive work in order to comprehend their scientific and everyday experiences of that process. My thesis is entitled "Theorising Organisational Power and Politics" precisely because it aims to examine the problems associated with the "academic and "everyday" theorising of that topic. Implicit in the title are the three tasks to which the thesis is devoted: first, to examine critically those approaches which have theorised organisational power and politics; second, to develop a general sensitising framework, built upon the postulate of voluntarism, with which organisational power and politics can be theorised as a subjectively meaningful social process; third, and complementarily, to make the central and prior problem of that framework, an understanding of how participants themselves theorise organisational power and politics.

As with many theses the preliminary task is to consider critically the ways in which social scientists have attempted to make sense of the topic. As I shall explain below, it is crucial to know how sociologists in particular have theorised power and politics in organisations, but the acquisition of that knowledge is not a straightforward job of processing formal definitions. In general, I shall argue that many approaches in the literature fail

to construe the meaningfulness and complexity of the subject-matter, while others provide highly insightful views of the latter but do not take their analysis far enough. It is important to understand why these approaches have failed in or have fallen short of their objectives, and I shall contend that quite often the theoretical frameworks themselves are antithetical to the discovery and investigation of organisational politics as a complex, contingent social process.

The second task implicit in the title is the overall purpose of the present effort viz. to theorise organisational power and politics within interpretive sociological parameters. Within the present context, it is not possible to elaborate all the relevant arguments, but I have concentrated on those aspects of such an approach which I believe are most in need of development and refinement. These problematic aspects constitute the third task referred to in the title, viz. the necessity of examining how organisational participants themselves contrive to act 'politically' by theorising the organisation and producing interpretations which serve as the subjectively meaningful focus of such action. These acts of "everyday organisational theorising" are the ("voluntaristic") interpretive work which mediate between structure and power (as "constraint"), and the observed action and process.

My theorising is therefore not intended to be "complete" in the sense of covering in depth all facets of the topic, but it does seek to make the case for, and show possible lines of penetration into, the study of "everyday organisational theorising". I shall argue that such a study can be conducted by extending and refining some of the prevailing themes in the literature.

One of the major differences between academic and everyday theorising is that, on the face of it, the former is more rigorous, systematic and formalised. The 'respectable' sociologist entering into a theoretical discussion of, say, power and politics would first of all define his concepts concisely and precisely; on the other hand, to do this in everyday life would be to court social failure e.g. becoming socially defined as an 'eccentric' or a 'bore'.

However, in my reading of sociology, the formal definitions of concepts, which embody the theorist's undoubtedly fine intentions, are quite often more misleading than helpful. This occurs because formal definitions tend to lose their clarity and neatness in the developing arguments, as concepts come "face to face", so to speak, with other concepts in the construction of propositions and "compound" ideas. To be more specific, however precisely 'power' is defined as a *concept*, the theoretical work of that concept involves it in relationships with other concepts and ideas, so that the effective meaning of power as a *conception* or "view" (cf. Rawls, 1972, pp.5-6, and Lukes, 1974, p.27, note 1., in which Rawls is cited) within the theoretical framework may, and frequently does, change. In order to understand how a topic, such as power and politics, has been academically *theorised*, therefore requires the discovery of what I shall call the "effective conception" of power and politics - which is usually as implicit as it is explicit - rather than the uncritical acceptance of the formal definition or concept.

Although this argument is not new, many social scientists continue to presume that the phenomena they wish to encapsulate can be easily and completely defined by detailing those 'essential' criteria for the recognition of those phenomena. While such "complete definitions" (Waismann, 1960, p.122) or "enumeratory concepts" (Novak, 1972, p.380ff.) might be possible in some disciplines, most *social* phenomena, including power and politics, are too complex, with too many potential descriptive dimensions each with unforeseeable possibilities for extension (see also 5.1.3). Such phenomena can only be approximated by complicated, compound 'concepts' in which inhere many undescribed, possibly indescribable, characteristics. Novak (ibid.) calls concepts which are pregnant with theoretical implications and propositions, "syndromatic".

It is not surprising that power and politics are difficult to define completely, because they are compound ideas whose meaning within a framework depends upon how they are theorised with respect to other concepts of "power-political" relevance - for example, order, conflict, opportunity, constraint, structure, action. The relationship between these concepts, and the topic in question, "fill out" or "expand" defined concepts, thereby altering the effective meaning of power and politics.

In Part One, a great deal of effort is expended on the arduous task of teasing out the effective conceptions of power and politics in the literature, and in Part Three the theoretical and conceptual dimensions (themes) identified are examined, elaborated and interrelated in order to present a fuller theoretical image of the topic.

## 1.2 Prevailing Conceptions of Power and Authority

I have already suggested that 'power' and 'politics' are closely interrelated ideas and topics, so that, if politics are seen as the exercise(s) of power for various goals - personal, sectional, organisational - with various consequences - e.g. supporting or changing (aspects of) organisational life - it becomes important in a thesis of this nature to develop an adequate, though necessarily incomplete, conception of power. In Part One, especially in Chapters Two and Three, I shall be considering in depth the existing views of power in organisations and their implications for the study of organisational politics. In this respect, I shall be arguing that the dominant "orthodox" views have tended to reflect, in part or whole and in various combinations, those conceptions of power - and their sociological traditions - which prevail in general sociology. The present section serves to introduce these prevailing conceptions of power and of authority in order to indicate some of the conceptual issues and controversies in the area, but also to establish a platform from which to discuss, compare and contrast *organisational* conceptions.

Although, in a sense, the following views of power and authority are ideal-typical, I have tried to avoid the problem of constructing conceptions which are attributable to nobody because of their abstractness, by citing the writings of those authors most directly associated with the conception in question.

### 1.2.1 Conceptions of Power

The views of power espoused by orthodox organisational sociologists derive from three major approaches which have dominated the social sciences in the 1950's and 1960's : structural-functionalism, exchange theory and behaviourism. These three 'approaches' are not equivalents in many senses (e.g. it is evident that behaviourism is more of a method than a theory) but each does present a logically consistent view of power, its sources and its consequences. The importance of understanding the traditions which inform and certify theories of organisational power is two-fold : first a tradition operates like a pair of glasses, facilitating theorising by concentrating vision; second, and at least as important because it is often not raised to the level of consciousness, a tradition operates as a pair of blinkers which prevents the theorist entering into a dialogue with other traditions. As with traditions, so too with the conceptions these traditions promote.

#### (a) The Systems Conception of Power

One of the most important influences on organisational sociology has been the structural-functionalism associated with Parsons' general social systems approach. My concern is not to examine the logic and implications of this approach, a well-documented pastime of many sociologists, but to outline the conception of power that it permits and encourages.

Social systems are conceptualised as goal-seeking, which is therefore one of the functional prerequisites of social life. Power takes on its significance in the Parsonian social world because it responds to the problem of goal attainment.<sup>10</sup> Parsons formally defines power as the :

"... capacity to mobilise resources in the interest of the attainment of a system goal" (Parsons, 1956, p.228).

Furthermore this capacity is not the possession of human beings but is an attribute of the total system, in the sense that the system provides resources, facilities etc. to parts of the system in order "... to get things done in the interests of collective goals." (Parsons, 1960, p.181).

Power is thus a generalised capacity to use a "system-based holding of resources", (Rogers, 1973/74, p.1431) for system goals. Since the term 'system goals' is used interchangeably with 'collective goals', it becomes clearly associated with the question of 'social legitimacy' (see below p.18). Parsons broaches this point directly in his most developed contribution to the analysis of power :

"Power..is the generalised capacity to secure the performance of binding obligations by units in a system of collective organisation *when the obligations are legitimised with reference to their bearing on collective goals* and where in the case of recalcitrance there is a presumption of enforcement by negative situational sanctions..." (Parsons, 1967, p.308; my emphasis).

The functionalist conception of power (e.g. Dubin, 1960) may be conceived as a variant of the basic systems idea, since it too eschews 'the interpersonal aspects of power in favour of the view that power is conferred by the system upon units which perform the most important functions most exclusively'.

In summary this conception of power takes the 'system' as the overriding focus of analysis, and the system allocates the generalised (impersonal) capacity, in the shape of resources and obligations, to those subunits which contribute most (on some criterion) to the achievement of the system's goal. In short, power is created by the system and used for the system, and because it reflects collective interests (by assumption), the systems conception preempts the problem of legitimacy. Finally, because power is related by definition to goal attainment, it is a positive

resource (although it may be based on negative sanctions) rather than a creator of opposition (cf. Thompson, 1970a, pp.xi-xii; Lynd, 1959, p.35; see Giddens, 1968, p.263ff. for a critical discussion of the Parsonian position on power).

(b) The Exchange Conception of Power

The second major tradition to have influenced views of organisational power is exchange theory, which, initially associated with the social psychology of George Homans, finds its primary sociological exponent in Blau (1964).<sup>11</sup> Although Blau aims to build up a macro-theory of social structure, he does not take as his basic premise the 'systemic' nature of social life, but starts from micro-theoretical assumptions about exchange processes. Most social interactions are assumed to involve an exchange of intrinsic benefits, and, since "rational" men are assumed to seek rewards and benefits, many of which are only available from social relationships, social actors must involve themselves in social exchanges with others.

Social interactions are therefore occasions wherein participants receive and offer rewards, and ask for or perform favours. As long as rewards and favours are forthcoming in equal amounts the relationship remains symmetrical and balanced. However, when one party becomes a consistently greater supplier of rewards or doer of favours, the other party becomes *dependent*<sup>12</sup> on and indebted to the supplier - given that certain other conditions regarding the non-substitutability of services supplied etc. Initially, then, power emerges from exchanges which are asymmetrical, when benefactions supplied cannot be repaid in full.

In its primitive, emergent form, the nature of exchange conception differs from its systems equivalent. In the latter, as we have seen, power is system-based and system-related in its usage, but there is no such presumption underlying the emergent exchange notion. Power is initially interpersonal, deriving from the self-seeking manipulation of social relationships. Subsequently power cannot be defined as a facilitating characteristic of social

life - indeed, its essence lies in the *constraining* of people on pain of a negative sanction viz. the withdrawal of the rewards, services etc. which the power recipient values or needs (Blau, 1964, p.116).

This conception always requires an exchange between interactants, but if power recipients cannot reciprocate the favours or rewards how is the balance of the relationship maintained? Reciprocation occurs, according to Blau, because recipients must grant prestige and acknowledge status superiority to the supplier of rewards. Where this situation occurs repeatedly, power and status differences become crystallised in structures so that such inequalities lose their emergent qualities.

In summary, the primitive exchange conception concentrates on the interpersonal aspects of power as an emergent quality of all social life. Being generated within social relationships, this conception allows for the possibility of sectionalist interests and always, by definition, involves some kind of exchange between participants. Power is acquired when one member of the exchange supplies rewards or performs favours for the other, who, not being able to find alternative sources or do without, becomes dependent on the first. This position allows the supplier of rewards to demand favours in return, on pain of the withdrawal of the valued rewards.

(c) The Behavioural Conception of Power

This view, associated with the work of Dahl (1957, 1971), is not so much based upon rigorous theoretical reasoning as a compromise between an intuitive concept of power and the conditions which must be fulfilled to raise its empirical study to the level of "responsible" science (Dahl, 1971, p.354). In effect Dahl begins from the operational problems of how to study power scientifically and allows the conception of power to emerge within the limits set by the solution of that problem.

The overriding criteria which determine the general shape of his view are that power must refer to *acts* of power, and that these

acts must be *observable* to the researcher. The definition of power which Dahl chooses to match his behavioural stipulations refers to the *successful* attempt of a power wielder to shape a recipient's action (Dahl, 1957). Power, then, exists in its exercise, since one cannot observe a 'capacity', and power can only be recognised as such if the wielder's intentions are realised.

From the viewpoint of forming a research strategy, the only sensible way to observe acts of power is to enter overt decision-making situations and to record the successful influence attempts of various decision-makers. This stricture effectively ties the behavioural conception of power to formal decision-making processes. In order to obtain a picture of the real distribution of power, Dahl argues that only the "key" decisions should be studied, i.e. those decisions over which there exists manifest conflict. As a consequence the effective behavioural conception of power involves reference to overt opposition on decision topics (Dahl, 1971, p.359).

I shall let Lukes (1974) provide the summary of the behavioural conception of power. The context and purposes of his "one-dimensional" view of power are fundamentally different from those of the present study, but it corresponds directly to the behavioural conception.

"... this ... view of power involves a focus on *behaviour* in the making of *decisions* on *issues* over which there is an observable *conflict* of (subjective) *interests*, seen as express policy preferences, revealed by political participants" (Lukes, 1974, p.15).

Although there are few studies which use these conceptions in their pure sense - and since they have been abstracted from particular theorists this is hardly surprising - we shall see in Part One below that organisational sociologists have drawn upon them, either singly or in some combination.

### 1.2.2 Conceptions of Authority

The conceptualisation of authority concerns the articulation of power and legitimacy. The problem of legitimacy poses a recurrent theme in the history of theorising about power, and the way the problem is conceptually resolved may be seen to shape the resulting concept of authority. As with the discussion of power, I shall endeavour to examine purely conceptual questions although, since the organisation has been the most prevalent locus of theorising about legitimacy and authority, it is difficult to prevent some anticipation of the considerations in Chapter Two below.

Before exploring the conceptual variations and ramifications of the notion of authority, it is necessary to establish the ground meaning of 'legitimacy'. The "normal" common-sense usage of the term is probably best reflected in dictionary definitions which emphasise that legitimate actions are lawful or in accordance with laws (i.e. sanctionable rules established by some "authoritative" process). Such a usage confirms the formal images of legitimacy which are part of the *managerial* tradition in organisational theorising. The *sociological* image of 'legitimacy' is less formal and legalistic. For Weber (1964), an action or state of affairs acquires legitimacy to the extent that the actor's orientation to it reflects a belief in its legitimacy, independent of the bases of that belief (Weber, 1964, p.124). Through Weber's writings, legitimacy has become associated with the orientation or attitudes of the actors themselves rather than with a characteristic of the state of affairs itself.

Where the legitimacy of an action is grounded in (i.e. theoretically granted with reference to) a set of legal or formal codifications independent of the beliefs and evaluations of the actors subject to that action, I shall call it 'formal legitimacy'. Where actors orient their behaviour with respect to a (moral) belief in the appropriateness of that order or action<sup>13</sup>, whether or not that order or action accords with formal/legal criteria, I shall use the term 'social legitimacy'. Whereas formal legitimacy is prescribed by

rules, social legitimacy is conceded by social actors. It is, of course, both a theoretical and an empirical possibility that an action or order may fulfil the conditions of both definitions and hence be socially and formally legitimate.

Having clarified the notion of legitimacy and the basis of its sociological relevance, we can now consider the typical ways in which it has been seen to articulate with the notion of power.

The first thing to note is the general sociological agreement that power *per se* does not involve legitimacy<sup>14</sup>, and that authority does involve legitimacy in one of its two senses. A dispute does exist, however, over the nature of the relationship between power and authority. Two positions are discernible.

One position argues that authority may be defined as "legitimate power", where legitimacy might be 'social' or 'formal'. The exponents of the former view locate their theorising in the Weberian tradition :

"If the legitimacy of the exercise of power is acknowledged by the subordinated individuals we speak of legitimate power..." (Goldhamer and Shils, 1939, p.171 : the authors place this statement in the context of a discussion of Weber's typology of authority).

"Authority, or legitimated power, involves voluntary obedience based on some idea which the obedient holds of the powerful or of his position".  
(Gerth and Mills, 1953, p.195).

"Only the shared values of a collectivity can legitimate the power of a superior and thereby transform it into authority". (Blau, 1964, p.207).

Goldhamer and Shils, Gerth and Mills and Blau<sup>15</sup> all provide examples of how social legitimation can change power into authority. Bierstedt (1974a and 1974b) agrees that authority rests upon the legitimacy of power, but offers the formalist interpretation. He criticises the consensual image presented by Weberians because it fails to take account of the "mandatory" or "compulsory" nature of obedience to authority :

"Authority is ... a function of the formal organisation of an association and it is exercised in accordance with specific and usually statutory norms and statuses. It makes no appearance in the informal organisation". (Bierstedt, 1974b, p.252).

In short, power (or latent force) becomes institutionalised (Bierstedt 1974a, p.229), *that is* embodied in formal roles and statuses (Bierstedt, 1974b, p.251). It is because Bierstedt insists that compliance to authoritative commands is obligatory and compelling whilst simultaneously clinging to the notion of legitimacy, that ultimately he must offer a formalist view of authority. Despite the logic of his own position, Bierstedt *qua* sociologist wants to argue that mandatory compliance is *in the end* based on the consent of the collective, but he can only achieve this result by the unsophisticated use of a consensus *assumption* (Bierstedt, 1974b, p.255).

The second position regarding the relationship between power and authority agrees with the first that authority possesses the quality of legitimacy, but argues that to define authority as a form of power is certainly misleading, and probably "inept" (MacIver, 1947, p.85). Far from referring to a capacity or power characterised by some form of legitimacy, authority refers to :

"... the established *right*, within any social order, to determine policies [etc.] ..." (MacIver, 1947, p.83).

This relationship between power and authority is substantially supported by Parsons :

"Authority is essentially the institutional codes within which the use of power as medium is organised and legitimised... [It is] the aspect of status in a system of social organisation ... by virtue of which the incumbent is *put in a position legitimately* to make decisions that are binding, not only on himself but on the collectivity as a whole..." (Parsons, 1967, pp.319-320; my emphasis).

Authority, to paraphrase, defines the rights of role incumbents with respect of decision- or policy-making, to the acquisition and to the use of power (ibid.). Unlike power, authority in this view is neither held nor exercised, but sets the legitimate constraints on the use of power by some actor in a formal status or office.

The legitimacy of this institutionalised code of rights may be conceded by actors within the social unit in question, or imposed by the system or system power-holders (formally or functionally legitimated). When an author like MacIver acknowledges that myths and ideologies may be used in the "construction" of a consensus, the question of whether authority is conceded or imposed becomes a matter for philosophical debate. However, where institutionalisation<sup>16</sup> as a macro-system process is the ultimate legitimator and distributor of rights (e.g. Parsons), or where rights are simply those formally set down in the "rules" (e.g. Fayol, 1949, chapter 4), legitimacy is effectively imposed on formal grounds.

From the above, it is evident that whether authority is a form of power or a set of rights defining the scope of power, it is always based on legitimacy, and the latter can either be seen as a property to be dispensed by members of the collectivity in question, or one which is attributed to authority independent of their volition. This groundwork completed, we are now in a position to offer a three-fold typology of conceptions of authority along the same lines as

that produced for power above.

(a) The "Institutional" Conception of Authority

This conception of authority emerges from its relation to a formalist notion of legitimacy. In one way or another, this view associates the legitimacy of authority with its institutionalisation within a system or collectivity (e.g. Bierstedt, 1974a and 1974b; Parsons, 1967). The right or capacity of authority becomes attached to certain statuses or offices in the structure of the collectivity, and its allocation is guaranteed by the formal rules or legal order of that collectivity. The distribution of authority arises and is 'sanctified' because it reflects and contributes to the formal/"rational" needs or goals of the system. Quite often there are attempts to legitimate *sociologically* what is essentially an "institutional" conception, i.e. to transpose its formal legitimacy into a social legitimacy. (For example, Parsons' implicit and Bierstedt's explicit assumptions about consensus on the formal distribution of authority). Authority is impartial and impersonal because it is realised through offices or statuses and is accepted because it operates for the collective good and is a cultural expectation (Bierstedt, 1974b p.253ff.; Parsons, 1967, p.319ff.).

(b) The "Normative" Conception of Authority

Just as the notion of formal legitimacy binds together theorists with different views of the relationship of power and authority, so too with 'social legitimacy'. As we noted above, Weber argues for a "normative"<sup>17</sup> conception of authority in which, for various reasons, social actors share the view that the enactment of a 'capacity' or the exercise of a 'right' is justifiable and valid. It is for general conceptual purposes irrelevant whether the 'object' socially legitimated is the command itself (which may, for example, be seen as 'rational') or the office/official whence the command originated. This conception needs no assumptions about consensus, since the empirical existence of general agreement with the social order or a type of command must be verified as a precondition of authority.

In short, the 'subordinates' in any potential authority situation need to be directly or indirectly consulted to establish the extent of social legitimacy. Similarly, the impartiality of 'authority' cannot be assumed, since, in terms of a sociology of authority, such a feature cannot reside in an influence attempt itself, but is attributed to or withheld from that attempt by the social actors in question.

(c) The "Behavioural" Conception of Authority

A third conception of authority may be called "behavioural" because, like its counterpart in the area of power, it is built around the empirical problem of its recognition. Several theorists have taken as indicative of the legitimacy of authority, the continued compliance of subordinates :

"When a persuader becomes institutionalised, in the sense of being always accepted *and thus legitimated by the recipient*, this becomes authority". (Hall, 1972, p.207; my emphasis).

Whereas the grounds for ascribing legitimacy to the institutional conception are "formal", and those for the normative conception are "social", in the behavioural view legitimacy is implicit in the act of obedience.

It is not my intention to evaluate those general conceptions. Critical assessment of the major conceptions of *organisational* power, which in varying degrees incorporate the above, is a primary task in Chapters Two, Three and Four.

1.3 Plan of the Thesis

In this chapter I have introduced the major assumptions and arguments which underpin the theoretical work that lies ahead. Before moving to the substantive details, I wish to provide a broad overview of how the thesis unfolds within its formal structure.

In Part One, the main purpose is to examine critically what might be called the 'politics-related' literature of organisational research. "Power", "control", "authority", "influence" etc. are part and parcel of the vocabulary of organisation and of organisation theorists, and, in a sense, anyone who says anything about organisational life - its structure, process and functioning - at least implicitly has something to say about organisational power and politics. Yet some selection is necessary, both because of the vastness of the organisational literature and because my treatment of organisational studies - given the need to abstract the often concealed or implicit conception of organisational power and politics - is particularly detailed and lengthy.

I believe that I have selected first those aspects of the literature which bear most directly on the topic of this thesis and, second, those theorists whose contributions to the topic are most notable. In Part One, it will be suggested that those theories which belong to the politics-related literature may be grouped together according to the conceptions of power and politics they encourage. Specifically, it is possible to discern three general types of approach - the "unitary", the "pluralist" and the "critical" - and I shall examine these types of approach (and their component theories) in order to discover their strengths and weaknesses. From this investigation of the literature I shall extrapolate "conceptual themes" which are germane to a theoretical understanding of the topic and which may subsequently, in Part Three, be explored and extended within an interpretive sociological perspective. One theme of order and conflict emerges from the "orthodox" (unitary and pluralist) views of organisational power and politics examined in Chapters Two and Three; the second theme, counterposing the first face ("politics") and the second face ("structural power") of power, derives from the critical interplay between the types of approach reviewed in Chapters Three and Four.

Part Two constitutes a methodological and theoretical bridge between Parts One and Three. Chapter Five takes up a methodological problem that is a persistent feature of much of the academic theorising

evaluated in Part One. Many academic theories appear to be involved in a form of tautology, in which power and politics are theorised, not with reference to the socially contingent organisational world, but by the degree of conceptual closure or circularity *defined into* the theoretical framework. Theories 'work' because they must do so through a "watertight" set of internal definitions. As a result of this brief methodological excursion I recommend a "sensitising" approach to sociological investigation, thereby ensuring both the framework's empirical orientation and its sensitivity to future possibilities.

The theoretical component of this "bridge" reopens for more detailed discussion the crucial problem of reconciling the postulates of voluntarism and constraint within an interpretive sociological framework, and from the ensuing arguments there arises a third conceptual theme to add to those of 'order-conflict' and the 'two faces of power'. This theme addresses the possibilities and impossibilities of social action. The second "bridging" chapter (Chapter Six) summarises the arguments of the previous four chapters, and prepares the three conceptual themes for their theoretical extension and exploration in Part Three.

In this last Part of the thesis, my aim is to develop a sensitising framework of ideas and propositions which, drawing upon previous arguments, can make interpretive sociological sense of organisational power and politics while not foreclosing on future empirical possibilities. The postulates of voluntarism and of social contingency are thus parameters of the central effort to understand (possible) variations in the way organisational participants interpret (Chapter Eight) and "strategise" (Chapter Nine) the political dimension of organisational life. The two untenable extremes of "free-floating phenomenology" without constraint and of "structural determinism" without an adequate account of social-interpretive mediation are avoided by considering the "structural framework" of organisational power (Chapter Seven) as a set of biases or predispositions which are theorised by participants, and enacted, adapted or resisted according to structural, social and interpretive factors.

While responding specifically to the need to theorise organisational power and politics, Part Three addresses a number of important sociological - theoretical and methodological - issues. I thereby hope to contribute, if I may return to my opening remarks, to the integration of the organisational sub-field into its broader disciplinary area as a specialism which can fully participate in and illuminate issues, problems and debates of general and genuine sociological interest.

## Chapter One

### NOTES

1. There are, of course, very important exceptions, many of which are referred to in the main body of the thesis. For example, the works of Mouzelis (1975, originally 1967) and Silverman (1970) were landmarks in their own right in the field of organisations, and both sociologists are sharply critical of the state of organisational sociology.
2. See Champion (1975) for classic examples of this (e.g. p.153) and other unsociological assertions.
3. In these quotations, both Crozier and Mouzelis are referring in particular to Dalton's study (1959) which will be examined in Chapter Three.
4. The length and significance of this doctrinal dispute is indicated by the list of references to it in Corrigan, 1975, pp.236-237 (note 5).
5. Durkheim (1938), of course, provides the clearest statement of this view.
6. The complexities and intangibility of subjective meanings raise very important theoretical and methodological problems, some of which will be discussed in the later parts of the thesis. At this introductory stage it is sufficient to defend the need to study them by appealing to the argument that if, as is clearly the case, actors do behave according to subjective meaning, it is incumbent upon sociologists to try to study them however "complex" or "intangible" they may be. Alternatively, to neglect them altogether and investigate *only* "hard", quantifiable factors, is not only to oversimplify social factors *for the sake of appearing 'objective'*, but also to "trammel" sociological analysis (Hyman, 1972, p.69). See Chapter Five.
7. For reasons that will become apparent (see 1.1.3) I am not going to define "formally" what I mean by 'power', nor, by inference, what I *specifically* intend by the notion of politics. My views of these social phenomena, which are complex and related to other important 'political' ideas, will develop coherently during Part Three.
8. During the thesis I shall speak simply of "organisations", and this should be understood as referring to those complex, more or less formalised institutions which have become the conventional focus of organisation theory and the sociology of organisations. I shall not, for example, include the State in this category, although it might be analysed as such and, indeed, much of what I say could be relevant to it. On the other hand, I shall be particularly interested in work

8. (cont'd)
- and industrial organisations, not only because of a personal interest in them, but also because of the massive amount of research that has been undertaken in them.
9. This is not to deny that important political actions and processes occur with respect to external groups (e.g. other organisations, agencies and institutions). The line between 'internal' and 'external' politics is impossible to draw, and external political relationships will inevitably influence internal ones (and vice versa) - e.g. union-management politics. In general, I am interested in *intra* organisational relationships (i.e. human participants in the same arena) rather than interorganisational ones.
10. The importance of power is further inflated in the Parsonian organisational world because the organisation is specifically and primarily oriented towards the attainment of goals (Parsons, 1956). The association of power with the goal-attainment problem area also makes clear the distinction between power and social control. Whereas power is a positive goal-seeking capacity, social control is located in the integration problem area and is largely a system of constraints.
11. Georg Simmel's work on dyads and triads anticipates much of social exchange theory as it has developed in the hands of Homans (1961) and Blau (1964). I have concentrated upon Blau's contribution for two reasons : first, he provides the clearest statement of exchange theory as a *sociological* enterprise with some affinity to the symbolic interactionist traditions of, for example, Goffman, whereas Homans remains mainly within a behavioural psychological perspective; second, Blau consciously aims to conceptualise power within his broader framework.
12. Blau readily assimilates Emerson's analysis of power-dependence relationships, and his conditions of power (Emerson, 1962 and 1964), into his exchange theory of power (Blau, 1964, p.118ff.).
13. To argue that actors orient their behaviour with reference to such beliefs does not imply that the actors therefore conform to the dictates of the order they define as legitimate. Weber makes this point explicitly (1964, pp.125-126; see also Coegg, 1975, p.60ff.), although, as we shall see, this aspect of the Weberian legacy, as with so many others, is often overlooked.
14. We have already seen that Parsons' view is an important though relatively isolated exception. His general systemic notion acquires legitimacy by its assumed relationship to the attainment of collective goals.
15. Blau (1964, pp.205-206) actually distinguishes between "formal authority" and "legitimate authority" which approximately corresponds to the difference between "institutional authority" and "normative authority" (see below p.22).

16. It should be remembered that there is no necessary relationship between institutionalisation and formalism, since the former can be a genuine *social* process. The problem with the Parsonian view, and structural-functionalism in general, is their tying of 'institutionalisation' to system goals or needs rather than to processes of social interaction. Others take a directly formalist view of the process e.g. Bierstedt, 1974a and 1974b, see above.
17. The term "normative" has been selected, in spite of its unhappy connections with Parsonian theory, to indicate that actors share a sort of moral belief in a social order or action. Since the normative conception is not behavioural, there is no presumption that a shared sense of the validity of a command will inevitably lead to collective compliance or behavioural consensus. This is therefore in accord with Weber's conception of legitimacy (Weber, 1964, pp.125-126; see n.13 above.)

PART ONE

POWER AND POLITICS IN THE STUDY  
OF ORGANISATIONS

## CHAPTER TWO

### ORGANISATIONAL ORDER : POWER AND AUTHORITY

Ultimately any study of organisational behaviour must say *something* - either directly or by implication - about power, because organisation is a political phenomenon. However, some studies may be expected to reveal images of power, its sources, its purposes and its consequences, more explicitly than others, and it is such studies which constitute the politics-related literature and upon which I shall be concentrating in Part One. For the reasons put forward in Chapter One, the critical analysis in the following three chapters is lengthy and thorough, as I seek to discover and establish the effective conceptions of power and politics permeating the approaches in question.

In the present chapter I am particularly interested in those approaches which confront the conceptions of power and of authority in an attempt to comprehend how organisations achieve a workable degree of order and stability. In the three main sections of the chapter I shall deal in detail with Simon's decision-making approach, with Etzioni's compliance theory, and with mainstream sociological approaches to organisational authority. I shall suggest that their common concern with the (implicitly 'political') accomplishment of order, leads to other similarities such as a concentration of hierarchy, and to a subsequently weak conception of organisational power and politics.

#### 2.1 Simon's Decision-Making Approach to Organisational Behaviour

It is interesting to note that the topic of decision-making at the societal and community level has been invariably treated, almost by definition, as a political phenomenon. At the organisational level, however, decision-making has been subjected to a very different type of approach, one which emphasises rationality, the predictability of the actual decision, and the probability of the "correct" decision being made. Consequently the vast area of organisational decision-making theory<sup>1</sup> has been dominated by economists and administrative scientists, very few of whom have considered in adequate detail the role of social and political factors in the process of decision, and their influence on the decisional outcome. Indeed, as will become apparent, the

process of decision has been largely neglected as an actual sequence of social actions, since theorists have tended to concentrate on producing 'models' of varying degrees of abstractness and heurism that purport to predict the "best" decisional outcome.

The foremost representative of the modern approach to organisational decision-making is Herbert Simon, whose work in this area has inspired a large number of developments in the theory of organisation, which cover a vast theoretical range. Since it is impossible to cover this wide range in the present context, I have decided to focus on what may be considered the central core of his theory of organisational decision-making<sup>2</sup>, treating other emergent theories where it seems most appropriate<sup>3</sup>.

Simon's intentions are clearly discernible from these core works under scrutiny. His major aim is to liberate the theory of administration from the straightjacket of the traditional, formalistic approach of seeking the universal principles of organisation (Simon, 1957a, Ch.2; March and Simon, 1958, Ch.2), and this is to be accomplished by considering administrative behaviour as decision-making (Simon, 1957a, p.8)<sup>4</sup>. In order to achieve this objective, it is necessary to push the frontiers of decision-making theory beyond those mapped out by micro-economics. This progress is to be achieved by taking an analytical, behavioural approach, viz. to understand how people *actually* take decisions in organisations.

This statement pinpoints basic differences between Simon's approach and the alternatives provided by traditional administrative theory and conventional micro-economic analysis. Simon has discussed the weaknesses of these approaches in a number of places. Of the former he says :

"Administrative description suffers currently from superficiality, oversimplification, lack of realism... It has refused to undertake the tiresome task of studying the actual allocations of decision-making functions". (Simon, 1957a, p.38).

To the extent that they do not suffer by having purely prescriptive concerns, micro-economic theories most certainly share with administrative theory the failure to analyse human decision-making behaviour in a realistic way, by assuming that economic men always maximise. In addition, the premise that organisational decisions are taken by only one person (the entrepreneur) also oversimplifies what is a very complex behavioural phenomenon.

In what follows, I shall first outline the major components of Simon's theory; there will follow a critical discussion of these components with special reference to the theme of organisational politics; finally, I shall bring together the major points of criticism, from which overall conclusions may be drawn.

#### 2.1.1 Decision-Making and the Problem of Organisational Order

In contradistinction to conventional economic theories of the firm,<sup>5</sup> Simon considers the decision-making unit of the organisation to comprise its complete membership, so he cannot simply assume decisions to be the reaction of one economically motivated man, the entrepreneur. Furthermore Simon, as one of his main theoretical premises, postulates that the individual as a human being is potentially autonomous, in the sense that he has the logical capacity to make decisions independently of the presence or of the wishes of other people. This assumption is particularly interesting for my purposes, since the weight that Simon places on decision-making as "rational human choice" in a formally organised arena, reflects the underlying premises of this thesis (see Chapter One).

With his premises, Simon confronts one of the major recurrent problems for sociological analysis, namely, how and why do individuals surrender their autonomy to a larger social body; in Simon's case, the 'formal organisation'? This, of course, is the organisational equivalent to the problem of social order<sup>6</sup>.

Having consciously eschewed the behaviourally more simple solutions to this problem, the majority of Simon's work can be seen as

an attempt to construct a theoretical alternative based upon more realistic, philosophical and empirical assumptions.

Simon's theory of organisational decision-making may be analysed in terms of a number of interrelated sub-theories which cohere logically to answer two questions. First, when organisational decisions are not taken by one person alone (as is typical of such decisions), how does the decision-making unit of the organisation operate such that all the individual decisions of participants produce a collective decision? In short, as was posed in the last paragraph, how and why do individual actions become organisational behaviours? Second, in what way and to what extent can the resultant decisions, both individual and collective, be described as 'rational'? In order to answer the first question, Simon constructs sub-theories regarding the anatomy of organisational decision-making, the operation of organisational influence, and the nature of human motivation in organisations. The second question requires the development of the concept of 'bounded rationality'. I shall outline his argument in this sequence.

Choices or decisions are always based upon an assessment of the information held with respect to the pending decision, in the case of the "autonomous individual", the relevant information having been accumulated by himself and resulting from a number of prior 'sub-decisions' taken in the recent past. Each of those subdecisions will in turn have been based upon an assessment of available, collected information... and so on, demonstrating the relevance of a 'means-ends chain' scheme in understanding individual choices.<sup>7</sup> However complete autonomy is not possible within the organisation, so that, if decision-making activities are to cohere in an integrated manner, they must be constrained in some way.

Simon conceives of the formal organisation as a specialised corporate entity, and this specialisation is not only horizontal in the traditional sense of the division of labour or of work, but is also vertical :

"... vertical specialisation... refers to the division of decision-making duties between operative and supervisory personnel." (Simon, 1957a, p.9).

The organisation as a decision-making unit therefore operates in such a way that the decisions of individuals at different hierarchical levels hang together more or less tightly; but what are the mechanics of this confluence of the individual in the collective? According to Simon this occurs because organisational decision-making may be seen as a means-ends chain (see Simon, 1957a, p.62ff.) not dissimilar from that already described for the autonomous individual. It is postulated that any organisation has ultimate objectives which define (often ambiguously) the tasks and purposes of its participants as a collectivity. These goals are established by top decision-makers, and represent the "value premises" for decisions to be taken at the level immediately below. For any two contiguous organisational levels, the decisions taken at the higher one set the decisional context of the lower level; at this level the participants accept the higher decisions as value premises for their own decisions which normally result in more practical interpretations. In addition to the acceptance of guiding values, the taking of a decision also requires certain factual information on the availability and consequences of competing decision possibilities. This information constitutes the factual premises of the decision, and such data may result either from the activities (and hence decisions) of other organisational members, or from the search activities of the decision-maker himself. The decisions at one level are in this way seen to define the remit of the participants at the next level down, and so on until the operative level is reached. This chain of decisions from top to bottom links together the decision activities of all organisational participants, by focusing their attentions on behaviour, which is increasingly limited in its scope and practical in its character as the hierarchy is descended, but is nevertheless, by virtue of this chain, related to (and once, twice ... 'nth' removed from) the ultimate objectives of the organisation.

Having explained the anatomy of organisational decision-making, there remains the question of why this process should happen. If

participants share the human characteristic of freedom of choice, why do they surrender to the demands of the organisation, and accept as their own those decisions which define more or less rigidly the nature of their behaviour? Together, the sub-theories of organisational influence and of human motivation attempt to reconcile choice with (apparent) constraint.

It is at this stage that the implicitly political aspects of the approach emerge. Simon investigates in some detail two forms of organisational influence, viz. authority and identification, which respectively exemplify the "external" and "internal" modes of acceptance (cf. Simon, 1957a, p.123).

"Of all the modes of influence, authority is the one that chiefly distinguishes the behaviour of individuals as participants of organisations from their behaviour outside such organisations. It is authority that gives an organisation its formal structure..."  
(Simon, 1957a, p.124).

In its most general form, authority is defined as a relationship in which :

"The superior frames and transmits decisions with the expectation that they will be accepted by the subordinate [and the] ... subordinate expects such decisions, and his conduct is determined by them". (Simon, 1957a, p.125).

Only when these two behaviours co-exist is there an authority relationship, so that if obedience/acceptance<sup>8</sup> is not forthcoming, the attempt to exercise influence *is not authority*. The reasons for obedience/acceptance are irrelevant in terms of Simon's "objective and behaviouristic" definition - that a command *is* obeyed is sufficient, for this shows that decision premises have been accepted without question.

Authority and identification are not unrelated actions:

"Initially, [organisational objectives]... are usually imposed on the individual by the exercise of authority over him; but to a large extent the values gradually become 'internalised' and are incorporated into the psychology and attitudes of the individual participant". (Simon, 1957a, p.198).

With repeated subjection to organisational goals through the acceptance of authority, the participant gradually and often unconsciously absorbs them into his own system of values and beliefs, resulting in a kind of voluntary, unsolicited loyalty to the organisational cause.<sup>9</sup> Where a participant's personal goals are the same as the organisational goals, his decision-making behaviour is unproblematic even in the absence of authority.

The argument so far may be summarised as follows: organisational decision processes are supportive of organisational goals because of the mechanics of vertical specialisation, and because the organisation constrains the behaviour of individuals by providing decision premises which first are accepted uncritically (through the operation of authority) and second gradually become internalised (as the individual identifies with the organisation). But why should individuals allow the organisation to erode their freedom by imposing authority? Simon's analysis of this problem, effectively establishing a theory of human motivation in organisations, is based upon Barnard's theory of inducements and contributions. (See Barnard, 1938, especially Chapter 11) :

"The contributions of personal efforts which constitute the energies of organisations are yielded by individuals because of incentives".  
(Barnard, 1938, p.139).

From the individual's viewpoint :

"The members of an organisation ... contribute to the organisation in return for inducements that the organisation offers them". (Simon, 1957a, p.111).

The mix of inducements offered will vary from organisation to organisation, but Barnard distinguishes between what may be called "objective incentives", such as material and monetary benefits, shorter hours etc., and "subjective incentives", such as religious salvation, realisation of ambition, intrinsic job satisfaction and the like. Although he acknowledges this distinction, Simon has concentrated upon the objective, especially monetary, inducements almost to the exclusion of others.<sup>10</sup> As a general proposition regarding motivation of participants, it is argued that individuals will (continue to) contribute as long as the inducements offered outweigh, or *at least* balance, the contributions they must make to the organisational process.<sup>11</sup>

Drawing upon this proposition, it is suggested that participants will therefore continue to obey/accept uncritically (within limits) the commands of superiors, as long as the balance of contributions/inducements is not unfavourable to them. Simon gives three interrelated reasons to account for the probability of obedience/acceptance: first, on his engagement, the employee accepts the legitimate right of the employer to command his behaviour (within the limits of the area of acceptance; see below) - this is true especially in the formal contractual sense (Simon, 1957a, pp.130-131); second, to have joined the organisation implies that the employee has already assessed the effects of these organisational requirements in terms of his inducements/contributions balance, viz. in return for the inducements offered, he forfeits the right to determine his own behaviour; and finally, the majority of organisational demands will fall within his "area of acceptance" (Simon) or "zone of indifference" (Barnard) - from the organisation's viewpoint, this area or zone may be expanded by the application of further inducement.<sup>12</sup> (Simon, 1957a, p.116).

The full answer to the first question (viz. how do the actions and decisions of individuals become integrated into the decision-making unit of the organisation) can now be given. In deciding to join the organisation, each participant surrenders his right and capacity to determine fully his behaviour, and, by his uncritical acceptance of premises handed down by his superior, ensures that his activities and choices are relevant to the objectives of the organisation. This situation will continue as long as organisational demands neither require greater contributions than inducements nor fall outside the limits of acceptance.

The second question involves a brief discussion of Simon's theory of rational choice. It is probably for this work that he has received most acclaim,<sup>13</sup> but he starts from a conventional view of rationality :

"... [Behaviour] is rational in so far as it selects alternatives which are conducive to the achievement of the previously selected goals." (Simon, 1957a, p.4).

The central distinction between individual behaviour and organisational behaviour which underpins the total theory, continues to play a large role in his analysis of rationality. Commencing from the examination of the rationality of individual choice, he constructs a theory of rationality in organisational decision-making by simple aggregation within the context of his theory of the operation of the decision-making unit.

In a number of memorable articles and chapters, Simon decisively repudiates the view of the organisational decision-maker as a "maximiser", and substitutes a view of human choice as "satisficing"<sup>14</sup>. He explains a number of psychological objections to the maximising concept of human decision-making, and postulates what he calls the "principle of bounded rationality" :

"The capacity of the human mind for formulating and solving complex problems is very small compared with the size of the problems whose solution is required for objectively rational behaviour in the real world - or even for a reasonable approximation to such objective rationality." (Simon, 1957b, p.198).

Since organisational decision-making occurs through behaviour of individuals who "... have not the wits to maximise" (Simon, 1957a, p.xxiv), the organisational process is also constrained, and limited to the achievement of a bounded organisational rationality. Organisational rationality is ensured, by the decision (means-ends) chain as described above, since the behaviour of individuals is thereby oriented towards the organisation's objectives; but the psychological limits on their choice behaviour are necessarily inherited by the organisation *in toto*.

In summary, the organisation as a decision-making unit operates cohesively by placing a system of formal constraints on participants' organisational decisions; and rationality, although hampered by the psychology of the decision-makers themselves, may be achieved by ensuring that the individuals' 'boundedly rational' behaviours are 'influenced' in the direction of the organisation's objectives.

#### 2.1.2 The Implications of the Decision-Making Approach for Organisational Power and Politics.

In essence, the aim of Simon has been to construct a set of categories which is capable of describing what goes on in organisations, where this behaviour may be understood in terms of a process of decision-making (e.g. Simon, 1957a, pp.xlv - xlvi). His theory has a logical coherent structure with at least a surface plausibility. However, in the context of the present thesis, his arguments need to be examined in depth to ascertain the extent to which they account for decision-making as a political process. In critically investigating four facets of his approach - viz. the concepts of 'decision', 'authority', 'rationality' and 'conflict' - I shall attempt to draw out the effective conception of power and politics which permeates his theory.

(a) The Concept and Process of Decision

Simon grounds his theory of organisation upon a very broad definition of decision, which, for his purposes, is inseparable from, and used interchangeably with, the idea of choice itself (Simon, 1957a, pp.3-4). A theory of organisational decision-making, like any theory of human behaviour, must examine choice processes. Such interest in the idea of choice - which is also at the heart of the present effort - is to be commended, since organisational analysis has tended to focus upon deterministic external constraints. However, a closer examination of what Simon effectively proposes, reveals that the premise regarding human choice is purely philosophical in substance; his analysis of the organisational decision process indicates a quite transparent concept of human choice which plays no effective role.

The notion of choice or decision is from the start defined in individualistic terms, being concerned with the mechanism whereby behavioural alternatives are narrowed down, and the process of choice, by referring to the way an individual copes with the problem of finding an acceptable solution, is a psychological affair.<sup>15</sup> This psychological concept of decision itself reinforces the general psychological orientation which permeates the total theory, hence confirming its coherence. While the internal consistency of the theory is not in doubt, I believe that Simon's concepts of choice and decision process suffer from significant theoretical and sociological weaknesses.

*Theoretically*, Simon defines the notion of choice so broadly that the relationship between choice and behaviour becomes indefinable. In this broad notion, Simon includes both thoughtful reflection and unthoughtful reflex, and human choice becomes more or less equivalent to human behaviour. With such an all-inclusive meaning, the concept of choice cannot elucidate the analysis of human action. The notion of decision-making (as so defined) is *sociologically* naive because of the implications of Simon's attachment to "learning theory"<sup>16</sup>, with its "stimulus-response" connotations that become evident in his behavioural notions, and to a psychological concept of choice. These sociological weaknesses are two-fold: he fails to examine choice in terms of

subjective meaning, and he neglects *social* influences on the process of organisational decision-making.

With respect to the first of these sociological shortcomings, Simon's concept of human choice involves little sense of social action in Weberian or phenomenological terms, because it incorporates no idea of subjective meaning, and because decision-making must be studied *as behaviour*. Among sociologists, interest in choice behaviour has emerged because such activities allow the theorist to build into a framework a more realistic image of the social actor - as someone who, with others, actually creates and maintains social reality. If, however, choice behaviour includes the reflex action of the typist (Simon, 1957a, p.3), and can be understood more generally as a response simply evoked by stimuli in the 'psychological environment', Simon's propositions provide a very restricted conception of how people participate in, and influence the process of organisational decision-making.

At one level the stimulus-response approach abstracts from the creativity of human choice behaviour, but defining the idea of 'decision process' in terms of the reactions of the individual decision-maker, also limits to a minimum the analysis of sociological influences on decision-making.<sup>17</sup> That organisational decision-making is a social activity which takes place in a social situation receives little theoretical acknowledgement, and the few contextual factors receiving systematic attention (of which "authority" is the major example) operate more by default than by intent (see below). Simon's general psychological orientation predisposes him towards analysing the cognitive and informational influences on decision-making, and as such he fails to perceive that human decisions are not only constrained by the rational possibilities of the decision in question and the psychological characteristics of human learning, but also by the social and political characteristics of the decisional context.

As a general statement, Simon's concept of choice appears to be unsatisfactory because, paradoxically, its meaning is co-extensive with the concept of human behaviour, and the psychologistic view developed by Simon conceives of behaviour in a type of 'stimulus-response' fashion. In short, his concept of choice behaviour is

*effectively* (i.e. in terms of how it actually operates within the theoretical framework) indistinguishable from behaviour which is externally determined or constrained. This general paradox can be illustrated by pre-empting our examination of his concept of authority; authority is the only well-developed social or political factor in his theory of organisational decision-making, and it is informative to see how it influences human choice.

"In joining the organisation he [the employee] accepts an authority relation... Acceptance of authority by the employee gives the organisation a powerful means of influencing him - more powerful than persuasion, and comparable to the evoking processes that call forth a whole programme of behaviour in response to a stimulus". (March and Simon, 1958, p.90).

When a command is given, the employee withholds his critical faculties and behaves as if responding to a stimulus of authority. But, in Simon's broad psychological sense, the employee has still *chosen* to behave as he does. It is clear that the notion of constraint is subsumed under the label of human choice, for the employee chooses to be constrained (because of an *assumed* past decision to accept, within limits, organisational authority) in the same sense as the typist "chooses" to exhibit a reflex action (cf. Simon, 1957a, p.3). Barnard, in his discussion of authority from which Simon derived his concept, quotes with enthusiasm a passage from a Major-General James G. Harbard; this passage appears to take this paradoxical notion of human choice to its absurd extreme:

"A democratic president had forgotten that the greatest of all democracies is the Army. Discipline and morale influence the inarticulate vote that is instantly taken by masses of men when the order comes to move forward - a variant of crowd psychology that inclines it to follow a leader, but the Army does not move forward until the motion is 'carried'. 'Unanimous consent' only follows

co-operation between the *individual* men in the ranks."  
(Harbard, *The American Army in France*, 1936, quoted  
in Barnard, 1938, p.164).

This quotation reveals much about the shared notion of authority and its prescriptive and ideological implications, but for the purposes of this section, it demonstrates the problem with Simon's concept of human choice, which is far too extensive in its definition. The paradox of constrained choice can be simply resolved by recognising that Simon employs the notion of 'choice' in an unconventional sense, and by failing to be deceived by its recurrent usage. A problem remains, however, because the continued use of the concept does have consequences of an ideological kind - with subsequent implications for the image of organisational politics - for, in our culture, individual choice and democracy are interwoven, and if employees choose to "accept" commands without question, the organisation appears to be 'democratic' and 'cooperative' in its operation, possibly in spite of the reality.

Through an inadequate and confusing conceptualisation of human choice, Simon overemphasises the psychological aspects of his topic of enquiry and fails to develop a realistic analysis of the social process of decision. As we shall see, his examination of socio-political influences on the process of organisational decision dissolves into a set of self-reinforcing but unsatisfactory, formalistic assertions about the nature and processes of authority.

(b) The Operation of Organisational Authority

Bearing in mind the problems related to the process of human choice in the organisation, I shall now proceed to an investigation of Simon's analysis of the role of authority in organisational decision-making. The concept of authority plays a key contextual role in the explanation of the process of decision-making, and Simon's propositions constitute a coherent system of ideas which appears to provide a simple way of understanding how the organisation operates. A deeper analysis of his concept of authority and the resulting image of the organisation suggests that the theory works because of a number of explicit and implicit assumptions and omissions, and that its surface plausibility is built upon formalistic, prescriptive, even tautological premises.

For Simon, with his behavioural conception, authority exists only in its acceptance, and acceptance is represented by the subordinate's act of obedience, in which his willingness to withhold his critical faculties is realised. Such an "objective and behavioural" definition is clearly intended to simplify the process of empirical research by making it *ab initio* operational. This empirical concern as expressed in the definition of authority, however genuine, has distinct theoretical consequences.<sup>18</sup> Simon's analysis of organisational decision-making depends on the subordinate's acceptance of superiors' decision-premises as defining his focus and scope of interest, and a close examination reveals that the concept of authority fulfils this analytical function by empirically unsatisfactory means. Four main reasons appear to account for the success of authority in securing a trouble-free compliance with organisational demands, i.e. in accomplishing organisational order.

First, the acceptance of "authority" is made a matter of definition - non-acceptance of commands is ruled as *not* a case of authority, *thereby* not part of the formal structure of the organisation and (presumably) outwith the remit of the organisation theorist. It is therefore not surprising to find that very little attention is devoted to occasions when "authority" fails. Although the theory allows for the possibility of 'disobedience' by including reference to an "area of acceptance", there is no systematic analysis of the social and cultural determinants of the "zone", and, further, it is expected that organisational demands will anyway "normally" fall within it. The first reason why authority works in Simon's theory is because the definition biases the researcher against studying cases where disobedience occurs.

Second, Simon rationalises this assertion that authority *will* be obeyed, by formalistic assumption that the :

"... employment contract results in the creation of a continuing authority relation between the organisation and the employee". (Simon, 1957a, p.116).

In this way, he argues that acceptance may be normally expected *because* the employee has taken the decision to participate, thus reinforcing the assumed momentous nature of this particular choice. While the employment contract might influence some aspects of organisational behaviour, it is blatantly unrealistic to assume that it determines the everyday activities of the employee. It might be argued that formal contractual obligations influence some employees more than others, such as a "new recruit" or a "bureaucratic personality". However, one could suggest that the contract becomes less significant as the employees work out its effective limits, viz. occasions when employers do not or would not invoke its rules. Older and more experienced workers are most likely to have an operational definition of contractual obligations. From my angle, it is more interesting to consider the influence of groups on limiting the relevance of formal factors. It is inevitable that, given Simon's psychologicistic approach, authority (as conceptualised institutionally) is seen in terms of the *individual* response to this stimulus, and that the influence of social groups on employee's behaviour (and by inference on his definition of "what is acceptable") is neglected. Employees may indeed accept the decision-premises of superiors for any number of reasons, but it is sociologically unsound to assume that this will happen simply because a formal contract is signed. The latter itself may be subject to varying interpretations and responses.

Third, authority plays its theoretical role successfully and without strain on the system because the definition of authority does not allow for a distinction between different reasons for obedience. Authority may be recognised, according to Simon, by the fact that subordinates obey commands. However there are different reasons why obedience may be forthcoming, and these different "forms" of obedience might well be sociologically significant in their consequences for the political process of the organisation. Following Weber, 'authority' may be seen as referring to a form of compliance based on moral or normative agreement with the command i.e. as a form of legitimate power, where legitimacy is attributed to the command by the subordinate, *not* by the observer.<sup>19</sup> Simon's behavioural conception of authority fails

to distinguish between a power relationship in which 'obedience' occurs through moral commitment to a command and one in which fear of reprisals is sufficient to ensure compliance. Using Etzioni's terminology (Etzioni, 1975), Simon conflates bases of compliance, so that the analyst cannot distinguish coercive from remunerative power, nor, to a lesser extent, these forms of power from normative power.<sup>20</sup> The problem is not merely one of conceptual nicety, since the social consequences (in terms of organisational stability, efficiency, and politics) of each form of power are likely to be different in empirically significant ways.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, and further to the previous paragraph, although Simon's concept of authority does not necessarily relate to socially legitimate power, since he equates 'obedience' with 'acceptance', the concept tends to have *implicit* overtones of legitimacy. This is another example of a terminological confusion which has unintended consequences, in that it provides a facade of legitimacy where there is not necessarily any.<sup>22</sup> The concept derives an air of legitimacy also from two sources other than this conceptual muddle. First, the acceptance of authority, through the theory of how the organisation works, as a decision-making unit, is organisationally rational behaviour, and rationality connotes legitimacy. Second, because employees *choose* to accept authority, again because of Simon's confusing notion of choice (see above), this form of influence is given a further tacit, ideological promotion.

In summary, it can be seen that Simon's theory of authority works *because* of his circular definition of authority, the assumptions made with respect to its operation, and the neglect of the 'non-acceptance' and 'non-obedience' as distinct behavioural possibilities. These weaknesses, and Simon's confusing terminology, render the theory unsatisfactory as a basis for understanding decision-making in organisations, its plausibility resting on unrealistic references to formalism and implicit and invalid appeals to the legitimacy of the concept.

(c) The Theory of Organisational Rationality

Simon's concepts of 'bounded rationality' and of 'satisficing man' are clearly advances on the unrealistic assumptions of conventional micro-economics, but I would argue that the pervasive psychologism and formalism, noted elsewhere in this chapter, prevent him from developing the analysis of organisational rationality to a level where it would provide an adequate foundation for an understanding of decision-making. Simon's position possesses at least three weaknesses, from the angle of the 'organisational politics' thesis.

First, because of the arguments that have been presented in previous sections, his theoretical framework has an in-built strain towards organisational order and rationality, such that the way the *rest* of the theoretical system works leads to an expectation that organisational decision-making will be rational (in the bounded sense). Just as the analysis of organisational rationality gives the concept of authority a sense of legitimacy to which it is not necessarily entitled, so also the opposite is true: viz. the formalistic analysis of authority imbues the notion of organisational rationality with an unwarranted sense of inevitability. This relationship between the idea of a means-ends chain of decisions and decision-premises, the acceptance of authority, and the rationality of organisational behaviour is central to Simon's theoretical system. Indeed organisational rationality is so bound up with authority, that Simon goes as far as to argue that when orders are obeyed/accepted, one need seek no explanation beyond the invoking of rationality - rationality is a sufficient explanation of obedience (Simon, 1957a, pp.149-150). By extension, the acceptance of formal authority is organisationally rational behaviour, which can only mean that it accords with the wishes of the top decision-makers who set the goals. Consequently the unproblematic nature of authority in Simon's framework which is accomplished by a combination of formalistic assumptions, circular definition and analytical omission (see above), becomes reflected in the apparent inexorability of organisational rationality and order. The result is that the real theoretical problem of how 'organisational rationality' is actually achieved by participants is glossed over, and escapes systematic attention.

A second weakness stems from his persistent concern with organisational rationality, albeit of a bounded kind. This concern is so central to his arguments that at many stages of his discussion, his analysis seems to be more prescriptive than descriptive, although he denies such an interest (e.g. Simon, 1957a, p.220). However, Simon would be the first to concede that organisational rationality really reflects the values of the "ultimate controlling body" (1957 a., pp.112-113), and that rationality in organisational behaviour is, as elsewhere, a relative phenomenon (Simon, 1957a, pp.75-77; March and Simon, 1958, pp.138-139). What is distressing, is that this insight remains peripheral to his theory, and therefore the psychologistic emphasis of the analysis of decision-making is reinforced. The failure to develop rationality as a social category, means that it enters the theory of organisational decision-making only as a characteristic of the psychological process of choice. To conceive of the rationality as a characteristic which many conflicting social groups attribute to their own behaviour opens up a whole new vista of possibilities for studying decision-making as a political process.<sup>23</sup>

Not only does Simon neglect the social and political implications of rationality as a professed characteristic of the decision-making process, but he also fails to consider the fact that organisational rationality (as he defines it) is bounded by factors other than the purely psychological. The decision-making process is influenced by a number of factors which are social and political in character. For example, identification may occur either at the level of the organisation or at the level of constituent sub-groups, but it is not simply a psychological mechanism which binds the individual into the collectivity in question. It also imposes social and normative commitments on the individual, influencing both the way he (and his colleagues) perceives a problem and analyses it, and the types of solution which will be accepted as satisfactory. Only at this stage of analysis is it possible to understand how individuals actually take decisions in the organisational context. In short, a more realistic understanding of organisational rationality can be achieved by investigating its socio-political boundaries, thus raising the level of

analysis beyond psychology.

The neglect of social, cultural and political aspects of organisational decision-making must be considered as one of the major shortcomings of Simon's theory, and this is nowhere else more obvious than in his attempt to understand the notion of organisational rationality. Only by overcoming prescriptive temptations and psychologistic predispositions, and pursuing the sociological significance of 'rationality' as a relative concept, socially and structurally grounded, will the decision-making approach reach a level of theoretical adequacy.

(d) Consideration of Organisational Conflict

It would be unfair to assert that Simon gives no consideration to the phenomenon of organisational conflict, for, in spite of an almost total neglect in the first two volumes under scrutiny, *Organisations*, in line with its greater awareness of social factors, devotes a whole chapter to the topic. However, the treatment of conflict is not convincing, and I shall argue that the weaknesses of the approach to the topic is very much related to the assumptions that are made about its existence, to the general psychologistic orientation of the authors, and finally to the bias which was built into the theory as it had been developed before 'conflict' was given due recognition.

First, the consequences of Simon's psychologism may be examined. The bulk of his consideration of organisational conflict *either* relates directly to problems of "intraindividual" and "inter-individual" conflict *or* analyses "intergroup" conflict by direct or indirect analogy with the psychological approach to conflict. Of the three types of conflict,<sup>24</sup> the "intraindividual" kind is inescapably an issue which the individual himself is left to resolve as a psychological problem, and "interindividual" conflict, approached from the psychological viewpoint rather than a social perspective, is not elaborated beyond the minimum. While the inclusion of a discussion on intergroup conflict in itself indicates a larger degree

of sociological awareness than in other works, nevertheless the arguments progress with more help from analogies with learning experiments and reinforcement systems than from the social causes and consequences of the process of intergroup conflict. The concern with the individual dilemma of taking decisions in circumstances perceived as conflicting is valid at one level, but failure to raise the sights beyond psychology leads to the underdevelopment of the political relevance of social conflict in the organisational process, with a subsequent weakening of the total theory.

The second weakness derives from the assumptions underpinning the analysis of conflict. It is argued, with conviction, that the very nature of formal organisation itself may lead to conflict, since specialisation invariably results in some differences in attitude between specialisms. However, having made this point, the resulting conflict is also treated as if it were purely rational and formal. For example, 'interindividual' conflict arises from :

"... differences between the choices made by different individuals in the organisation. In this case, the individual participants are not in conflict, *but the organisation as a whole is.*"  
(March and Simon, 1958, p.118; my emphasis).

Quite apart from the sticky problem of reification this statement appears to take the very guts out of organisational conflict, which loses its sociological significance through the directly drawn inference that participants do not invest emotional and intellectual capital in the pursuit of preferred outcomes. The assertion that conflict between individuals and groups is strictly organisational, implies that it is merely a technical problem attributable to some fault in the formal system (e.g. a communication block). I am not denying that conflict is, or can be, structurally induced (see Chapter Seven), but to make it impersonal or 'rational' in some neutral, impartial sense, loses sight of the fact that conflict is a social process, created and sustained by human effort (see 3.2.3).

This purely technical approach to conflict is further reinforced by the assumption that the organisation is a self-equilibrating system. Although conflict is seen as stemming from the formal system itself, it is assumed :

"... that internal conflict is not a stable condition for an organisation and that effort is consciously directed towards resolving both individual and inter-group conflict." (March and Simon, 1958, p.129).

As such, any evidence of conflict will automatically produce an organisational reaction with an end of solving the problem and reinstating a stable balance. In part related to the notion of 'stimulus-response' at the level of the organisation, the idea of a 'neutral' organisational reaction overlooks the fact that any such reaction is inevitably instigated by a specific sub-group in the organisation<sup>25</sup>, and, far from being neutral or rational in some organisational sense, will be supportive (and seen by the disputants as being supportive) of the interests of that sub-group (presumably the "controlling body"). The notion of automatic conflict-resolution by the organisation, and the related view that conflict is a short-term condition, further detract from conflict as a socio-political phenomenon, and support the formalistic view of conflict as a technical problem. (cf. Mouzelis, 1975, pp.141-142).

The third weakness arises from the inadequate analysis of the relationship of politics to organisational conflict. One form of "organisational reaction" to the instability introduced by conflict is labelled "politics". March and Simon suggest that intergroup conflict may have overtly political consequences, since the organisation, in order to reinstate equilibrium, is likely to respond by bargaining or political procedures (March and Simon, 1958, pp.129-131). This view is obviously an advance on Simon's previous work, but is not satisfactory. Social conflict, as a technical problem, is seen as having a causal role by placing "... strains on the status and power systems in the organisation" (March and Simon, 1958, p.131). This simple relationship (i.e. conflict produces political behaviour)

emerges only from the equilibrating assumption about the organisation which accords political and bargaining processes a transient, remedial, conflict-resolution function, such processes (presumably) disappearing as the conflict is resolved, and as stability and normality are reinstated. However it is empirically naive to assume that political behaviour is merely a temporary response to a conflict situation; it is far more realistic to see political behaviour as constituting an ongoing process, *dialectically* related to organisational conflict and order. Social conflict, as an enduring feature of the organisation, is as likely to *reflect* the political groupings and alliances of the organisational situation, as to influence the future political process.

In spite of the explicit attention given to organisational conflict, the effective analysis of this phenomenon unavoidably reflects the general prevailing spirit of the established theory. Previous discussion has demonstrated that the framework tends, both intentionally and unintentionally, to overemphasise organisational consensus and cooperation. In recent years, Parsonian systems theory has been heavily criticised because it is based upon an inadequate analysis of power and a misleading conception of voluntarism in social action, which, with other central features, lead to a view of social life as more or less balanced and consensual. Simon's decision-making theory similarly fails to consider the problems of legitimacy (by tautology and assumption) and disobedience (by omission), and cannot satisfactorily examine choice and constraint. If people choose to be constrained by authority and thereby *necessarily* cooperate; if conflict is an impersonal and technical problem of the system; if the organisation by assumption operates as a self-adjusting equilibrating system; if these statements are a fair reflection of Simon's effective view of organisational life (including power and politics), his theory is inevitably conducive to organisational order, which is rendered unproblematic and predictable more by theoretical fiat than by explanation.

## 2.2 Organisational Control and Compliance

Although addressing "power" and "control" rather than authority, and in spite of deriving from entirely different theoretical traditions, various approaches to the analysis of organisational control and compliance share important features with Simon's decision-making theory. Of particular importance is their common concern with the hierarchical aspects of organisational power and with the problem of order.

The association of the concept of power with the notion of organisational control suggests a natural link between the analytical aims of sociology and the prescriptive ends of management approaches. The managerial and administrative wings of organisation theory (e.g. Fayol, 1949) have normally defined 'control' in a very narrow way to indicate the 'checking' functions necessary for adequate organisational performance :

"Control in this sense is limited to monitoring the outcomes of activities, reviewing feedback information about this outcome and if necessary taking corrective action". (Kynaston Reeves and Woodward, 1970, p.38).

While power in some general sense will enter into this organisational activity (as it will into most), to concentrate on such a narrow operation is undoubtedly to neglect aspects of organisational life which are germane to the sociological study of power.

With the spread of sociological interest into the domain of organisational control has some conceptions of increasing breadth. As we shall see below, Etzioni (1975, 1965) sees control as referring to the formal allocation of means for the effective achievement of organisational goals, and Woodward (1970) proposes a similar view in her work on control systems, which she suggests can involve personal and impersonal constraints on human activity; Etzioni defines these personal applications of the means of control as power (see below).

The notion of organisational control has been further "sociologised" by Millham et al. (1972), who dismiss the argument that control is simply the limitation of behaviour by the use of power (cf. Tannenbaum, 1968, and immediately below) or the imposition of technical constraints on organisational members, by adapting the Parsonian view of 'social control' to the organisational situation.<sup>26</sup> In their generalist conception, social control in organisations is

"... a process by which individuals are socialised and oriented towards norms" (Millham et al., 1972, p.410).

In their application of this structural approach to organisational control, Millham et al. distinguish five types of control process which intentionally or unintentionally direct behaviour towards organisational goals. Although prior to Millham et al.' contribution, Warner (1971) has effectively applied this reformulation of the concept of organisational control in the context of the television newsroom. (See also the general discussion of Bowen, 1976).

#### 2.2.1 Tannenbaum : Organisational Control and Organisational Order

The most impressive contribution to the empirical aspects of organisation control as a form of power, is certainly that of Tannenbaum and his colleagues (1968). My concern is only indirectly with their empirical work, to the extent that their solution to the problem of operationalising the concept of control actually changes the meaning and scope of that concept. As with the other studies in Part One, the emphasis is on discovering the *effective* conception of power that emerges from the theoretical and empirical work of the authors.

Tannenbaum's research task is two-pronged: first, he needs to conceptualise control and then make it workable; second, he wants to use his control variable(s) to explain other aspects of organisational structure and functioning by means of a comparative method.

"It is the function of control to bring about conformance to organisational requirements and achievement of the ultimate purposes of the organisation... [It creates] co-ordination and order ... out of diverse interests and potentially diffuse behaviours of members ..."  
(Tannenbaum, 1968, p.3).

This notion goes beyond the strictly managerial idea of 'monitoring', but falls short of the 'social control' views proposed by Millham et al. Tannenbaum effectively equates control with power, and links his central concept to the problem of organisational order :

"We shall use the term [control] ... to refer to any process in which a person or group of persons or organisation of persons determines, that is, intentionally affects, the behaviour of another person, group or organisation". (1968, p.5).

Following Dahl, control therefore becomes an instance of social causation, and is located in a 'control cycle' which constitutes a basic unit of organisational structure.

"If a cycle breaks down at any point, for whatever reason, control cannot be said to exist".  
(Tannenbaum, 1968, p.7).

It is clear that Tannenbaum is suggesting a behavioural definition of control, since it is said to exist only *in its exercise*, and we acknowledge that existence only when influence attempts are successful. The sociological implications of this sort of definition, as we shall elaborate below, are not in the definition itself which obviously aids the empirical study of control, but in the fact that it defines by inference the study of unsuccessful influence attempts out of the theory of organisational power. To put the same point in another way, the idea of control, and by association that of power, is defined in terms of compliance with or conformity to

organisational goals. Control therefore is heedless of the range of possible subordinate interpretations of and reactions to it.

Given this behavioural conception of power, it is somewhat surprising that Tannenbaum constructs the major control variables (incorporated in the 'control graph') using a reputational method.<sup>27</sup> He uses questionnaire responses from representatives of various (pre-defined) levels of the organisational hierarchy to develop measures of the distribution and amount of control wielded in the organisation. Even assuming that the respondents answered in a full awareness of Tannenbaum's definition of control and that they therefore were all talking about the same phenomenon - which is dubious given the difficulties which supposed experts have in so doing - it is doubtful whether the results tell us a great deal about 'organisational power' as an "objective" category. They should tell us quite a lot about people's *perceptions* of control *at various formal levels* of the organisation, which most certainly provide important clues as to the political process of organisation life, but it is a gross misuse of such data to assume that if you add the responses together and average them out (1968, p.24), you can obtain valid and reliable measures of

"... who or what hierarchically defined groups exercise control over the affairs of the organisation ... [and] how much control is exercised within the organisation from all sources."  
(Tannenbaum, 1968, p.33).

In summary, the effective conception of power in Tannenbaum's work is somewhat confused. Starting from an essentially behavioural definition, Tannenbaum builds control variables by manipulating in methodologically suspect ways data which are irreconcilable with his conceptual work. Nevertheless, using the control graph as his explanatory variable, Tannenbaum proceeds to examine its relationship to such factors as organisational effectiveness, communications, consensus, morale and satisfaction etc. He claims to discover patterns in the data, but at the sociological level such findings

must remain a mystery since it would appear to be virtually impossible to understand how the phenomenon which the control graph reflects, if it reflects any real social phenomenon at all, articulates with the other factors. This is an example of how certain researchers with an empiricist mentality (Gurvitch, 1955, has coined the phrase "quantomania"; see also Blumer, 1956) become so obsessed with the problem of measurement that they neglect the problem of meaning.

### 2.2.2 Etzioni : The Theory of Organisational Compliance

Dissatisfaction with Tannenbaum's theoretical clumsiness leads us to consider the compliance approach of Etzioni (1975, 1965) which takes up the same line of argument and develops it in a theoretically superior way. The work of Amitai Etzioni has proved a considerable stimulus to the study of organisational power, although the central concept in the framework is 'compliance'. This notion may be seen as "the organisational equivalent of social order" (1975, p.xvii), and

"... refers to both a relation in which an actor behaves in accordance with a directive supported by another actor's power, and to the orientation of the subordinated actor to the power applied" (Etzioni, 1975, p.3).

Etzioni's programme of action is similar to Tannenbaum's, the first task, the fruits of which will be the focus of my search for his effective conception of power, requiring a conceptual elaboration of types of compliance based upon the development of typologies of power and involvement, and the second task being a theoretical investigation of the relationships between compliance and other organisational factors using the comparative method. I shall argue that in Etzioni's view power is the dominant aspect of compliance, and so arguments about compliance are also, by inference, arguments about power; and that tying 'power' to 'compliance' inevitably restricts his view of politics to the problem of organisational order.

First, what does Etzioni effectively mean by power, involvement and compliance?

Power itself is given a general, relational definition :

*"Power* is an actor's ability to induce or influence another actor to carry out his directives or any other norms he supports". (Etzioni, 1975, p.4).

In the context of organisational analysis, it takes on two important limiting characteristics : firstly, power is associated with the formal structure, or hierarchy, of the organisation, since it is the possession of the 'higher participants', 'organisational representatives' or 'organisational elites'. (Etzioni, 1975, p.5); secondly, because it involves the "... use of various kinds of means for control purposes..." (Etzioni, 1965, p.651) where these 'means' are formally distributed to facilitate the attainment of 'organisational goals', power is functional in its use. The organisation makes available for control purposes different kinds of resource or means, and associated with each kind of means, physical, material or symbolic, is type of power, coercive, remunerative and normative.<sup>28</sup>

*"Involvement* refers to the cathectic-evaluative orientation of an actor to an object, characterised in terms of intensity and direction".  
(Etzioni, 1975, p.9).

The general notion of involvement refers to an attitudinal dimension, and the direction and intensity of a person's feelings may be shaped by any number of experiences (Etzioni, 1975, p.231ff.). In the organisational situation and with reference to the notion of compliance, however, the major determinant of the subordinate's orientation is the type of organisational power which he encounters (Etzioni, 1975, p.3 and p.11). A threefold typology of involvement in the organisation (alienative, calculative and moral) results from matching general categories of orientation to the type of 'power system' that predominates.

The conception of compliance (and a third typology) is dependent upon the nature of the relationship between power and involvement. It is never quite discernible whether the latter notions are simply descriptive of a state of compliance (i.e. another way of referring to that state) or whether the interaction between power and involvement are held in some way to cause the state of compliance.<sup>29</sup> It is more rewarding and of greater sociological interest to choose the latter interpretation, and if we do this, the fact that power is the dominant factor in its analytical relationship with involvement (for a direct statement on this, see Etzioni, 1965, p.651) means that a statement about the theoretical status of compliance is, by inference, also about power.

The cross-tabulation of the typologies of power and involvement provide nine types of compliance, three of which are said to be 'congruent'<sup>30</sup>, and the others 'incongruent'. Most of Etzioni's analysis is concerned with the 'congruent' types of compliance - coercive, utilitarian and normative - and since most organisations exhibit a dominant pattern (1975, p.23) (the 'primacy' assumption), they too are classifiable. Why does Etzioni restrict his analysis to congruent types of compliance? Two related rationales are offered: first because congruent cases are more frequent, and this is so because

"... congruence is more effective, and organisations are social units under external and internal pressure to be effective."

(Etzioni, 1975, p.13);

Second, because incongruence is a transient state, again because of the postulate of effectiveness. (1975, p.14).

The establishment of a typology of organisations related to the congruent types of compliance provides the conceptual basis for his comparative study of compliance structures and their association with other organisational variables (e.g. type of goal, degree of effectiveness, type of elite structure etc.)

It should be evident that the theoretical interests of Tannenbaum and Etzioni overlap to a large degree, and their conceptual analyses exhibits a number of similarities. The two theories of control/power and conformity/compliance in frameworks which stress the hierarchical nature of organisational power are factors which unite these authors with Simon in their common concern for organisational order. In the next few pages I shall examine the logic of Etzioni's approach in order to discover his effective conception of power as it relates to organisational order.

Why and how does Etzioni's theory of compliance account for the state of organisational order? The obvious answer is that the study of compliance concentrates on the problem of order and as such will inevitably overlook aspects of organisational power which disturb the 'order'; in short, it is a matter of theoretical strategy. This surely is part of the explanation, but I suggest that reasons also lie in the logic of his framework, because any theory which informs about compliance *should* also say something about the conditions of non-compliance and conflict.<sup>31</sup>

One reason why Etzioni says very little about the relationship between organisational power and conflict is rooted in the very definition of compliance. The latter refers to the relationship between a certain type of behaviour (power) and a set of related attitudes (or orientation) towards that behaviour. Compliance presumably refers to a state of *behavioural* stability amongst organisational participants, and yet the concept takes no cognisance of the behaviour of subordinates. Briefly, Etzioni defines a behavioural concept, for surely to "comply" is to *act* in a certain way, in terms of subordinates' "cathectic-evaluative orientation" to power (1975, p.9). Etzioni finds it a sufficient condition for a stable

organisational order that there exists a (socio)logical compatibility between type of power used and the type of subordinate orientation towards that power. By taking this view, he effectively divests subordinates of their part in creating a state of organisational order, and in rendering them passive, the stability of the organisation is ensured.

The sociological implications of this conception are most emphatically spelled out by considering the case most pertinent to the problem of conflict viz. the coercive organisation.

"Coercive organisations are organisations in which coercion is the major means of control over lower participants and high alienation characterises the orientation of most lower participants in the organisation". (Etzioni, 1975, p.27).

In concentration camps and custodial prisons and institutions, one might expect that organisational order would be of a highly precarious nature, but for Etzioni, to the extent that type of power matches type of involvement, compliance is expected to be a long-term state. There will normally exist hostile feelings among subordinates, but while Etzioni allows men to *think* negatively, they are not permitted to act in such a way, because their behaviour is ruled irrelevant to the nature of compliance. Non-compliance, and even conflict, are highly feasible reactions to coercive means of organisational control, but Etzioni is satisfied with noting the congruence between power and involvement, and thus ensures a state of order where sociologically one might expect, at least potentially, the opposite.<sup>32</sup>

Even if we accept this inadequate definition of compliance, it is still necessary to examine the sociological implications of Etzioni's major condition for long-term stability of organisational power structures i.e. the existence of compatibility or congruence between type of power and type of involvement. Congruent cases are most frequent and persistent *because* they are organisationally most

effective (Etzioni, 1975, pp.12-13) and incongruent cases show an inevitable tendency towards congruence because of the pressures on organisations to become effective.<sup>33</sup> Underlying the postulate of organisational effectiveness - a system 'need' - is the implicit notion of equilibrium, for organisations which possess incongruent compliance structures undergo a process of accommodation between the dominant type of power and that of involvement.

In assuming that such accommodation occurs, Etzioni fails to provide the *sociological* links between the organisational 'need' to be effective and the accommodation process, which relationship is critical to the attainment of long-term organisational order. What, in terms of his analysis, are the sociological implications of postulating 'effectiveness' as a causal influence on the relationship between power and involvement? Since we reject as sociologically unhelpful the *deus ex machina* notion of a self-equilibrating system, the above argument must imply : first that social actors within the organisation, intentionally or unintentionally act so as to sponsor the cause of organisational effectiveness; second, their actions must in effect mean either a change in the type of power applied and/or a change in the type of involvement elicited.

Organisational elites may choose to alter the mode of power in recognition of the fact that it would improve effectiveness, but this assumes that higher participants share a common definition of both 'organisational' goals and what constitutes 'effectiveness', problems which neither Etzioni nor Tannenbaum confront. More seriously in the light of the increasing supply of evidence on management behaviour and management 'bias' (see 9.3.2 below), it assumes that managers are actively concerned with the "collective good". Etzioni's deliberate choice of the phrase "organisational representatives" (1975, p.8) to refer to power-holders probably indicates his subscription to the consensual view.

As we have seen, however, Etzioni argues that power is the dominant factor in the relationship, since he explicitly defines type of organisational involvement as the attitudinal response to acts of organisational power. As such, where moral involvement is

paired with coercive power it is by definition an anomaly which has presumably arisen because orientations to the organisation derive from sources in *addition* to the direct experience of power (Etzioni, 1975, Chapter IX). It could be argued that where subordinate orientations have strong roots outside the organisation, as in certain cases where incongruence occurs, there is no *a priori* expectation that type of involvement will shift unless, improbably, subordinates permit it to do so through a direct or indirect allegiance to organisational 'needs'.

It is now possible to summarise the implications of Etzioni's implicit assumption of equilibrium. Type of power responds to 'needs' in a situation of incongruence only if it is assumed to be merely an organisational resource consciously tied to the achievement of organisational goals, and to be in the hands of higher participants who mutually agree to use it for collective ends. For this theory to work, managers and controllers in the organisational elite become neutral and passive social actors whose behaviour need not be consulted in order to understand organisational power. Alternatively, if the orientation of lower participants is to change in response to the demand for effectiveness, they must either subscribe to and agree on organisational goals directly, or be subjected to indirect pressures (presumably through acts of power) with the same consequence. The former possibility is improbable and involves an implicit consensual view, while the latter possibility needs substantial reformulation before it has any value.

I have shown that Etzioni's explanation of organisational order depends upon a peculiar definition, an implicit theory of organisational equilibrium and an unsubstantiated postulate of organisational effectiveness. Although it might be considered surprising in a theory where the subordinates' orientation to power is so crucial, it may lastly be argued that, in his view, power is essentially uncontested, formally legitimate and hierarchical. It is uncontested because, as we have seen, Etzioni's conceptual work has ruled out of court non-compliance or conflict as feasible strategies for lower participants - they have to obey, and this may be rationalised, for example, in terms of consensus. It is formally

legitimate because of its association with control and organisational goals (see Etzioni, 1965, p.650ff.). It is hierarchical because :

"*Power positions* are positions whose incumbents regularly have access to the means of power i.e. [control] ... In the following analysis we focus on power relations in organisations between those higher and those lower in rank". (Etzioni, 1975, p.5).

Those who wield power are those participants to whom the 'organisation' has formally entrusted the problem of organisational control, and the conception of power, from the viewpoint of the problem of legitimacy, may be likened to the institutional conception of authority and to the systems view of power.<sup>34</sup> Power is analysed in terms of its contribution to organisational goals (needs) and that power formally allocated is used for such ends is never in doubt. Although these authors conceive of power as a capacity used by individuals and groups, rather than in a generalised form, through a kind of tautology they effectively dispose of the human element by various definitional devices which guarantee compliance, and reinforce the theoretical commitment to it.

### 2.3 The Analysis of Organisational Authority

In 1.2.2 above, I examined the broad context of the problem of legitimacy and its relation to the concept of power. In 2.1 and 2.2 the problem was heeded in the discussion of some approaches to organisational power, and it was argued that in general these approaches have not dealt adequately with it as an *explicit* concern of theorising. In the above views, legitimacy tends to be ascribed to organisational power by fiat, by implication or by neglect, but now I shall look more closely at those studies directly concerned with organisational authority, and its conceptualisation, in order to assess the prevailing view and to help derive relevant conclusions about the role of authority and legitimacy in a theory of organisational politics. Organisational authority may be seen as being

'vertical' or 'lateral', although, as we might expect, the cultural association of authority and hierarchy tends to leave consideration of its horizontal aspects very under-developed. It may be noted from the start, that the following examination will tend to support the overall picture that has emerged above viz. that organisational authority has been *primarily* conceptualised as being formal or institutional in its legitimation and application, and as being hierarchical in its allocation.

Much of the work in this area is alleged to have its conceptual and inspirational roots in Weber's classic analysis of bureaucratic authority, and especially of the ideal type of bureaucracy (1964), and yet this "Weberian" tradition has developed in a way that more or less disavows the sociological premises and methodological principles upon which Weber himself constructed his organisational sociology. The view still persists, indeed prevails, that Weber conceived of bureaucracies as :

"... power structures operating in a quasi-judicial fashion : rational values legitimate them, trained experts run them, and the principle of hierarchy, prescribing a positive relation between the rank of a unit and its power, define its shape".

(Hopkins, 1969, p.170: see also, for example, Litwak's (1961) 'Weberian model' of bureaucracy).

Such a view is only tenable if the rationale of the 'ideal type' method (Weber, 1949, especially p.89ff.) is neglected and if Weber's analysis of bureaucratic authority is isolated from his broader commitment to an "interpretive sociology" (cf. Silverman, 1970, p.74; Clegg, 1975, p.57ff.).

### 2.3.1 Hierarchical Authority and Formal Legitimacy

If we follow up Hopkins' (1969) analysis of bureaucratic authority, which intends to reconcile the apparently divergent views of Weber and Barnard (1938), we find a typical example of how Weber's

work has been misinterpreted to support a purely 'institutional' conception. His institutional conception of authority develops from an initial behavioural definition :

"The exercise of authority consists of one person issuing a command and a second complying with it..."  
(Hopkins, 1969, p.179).

As with Simon, Tannenbaum and Etzioni, authority and non-compliance are incompatible notions, and such a view is clearly grounded in Barnard's work (which also influenced Simon). To serve his conciliatory aims, Hopkins misleadingly attributes this view also to Weber.<sup>35</sup>

Hopkins seeks a rationale for the inevitability of conformity as a response to an exercise of authority by turning to the notion of legitimacy which he correctly ascribes to Weber. When Weber's ideas are placed in the wider context of his interpretive sociology, 'legitimacy' is a social category assigned to a social order (in general) by those subjected to it; in the case of organisational authority, Weber suggests, subordinates are most likely to legitimate it because they hold a belief in the rationality of the formal structure. It is possible that the formal authority structure may not be seen as 'rational' and/or 'legitimate' for various reasons (cf. Gouldner, 1954 and 1965; below 2.3.2). However Hopkins makes the unjustifiable theoretical leap from stating the *existence* of a formal authority structure, to asserting that it has *therefore by virtue of its existence* been validated socially.

"... a system of authority has the property of legitimacy to the extent that the statuses and roles are institutionalised" (Hopkins, 1969, p.173).

The process of institutionalisation weaves rules and obligations into organisational statuses and roles, making some "commanding" roles and others "complying" roles, and these interlocking formal roles, with

their definitions of "appropriate" behaviour, provide evidence for both the existence of a stable (and effective) authority system and the rationale for its acceptance by superordinates and subordinates alike (cf. Jackson, 1964). In short, the formal structure and its institutional authority become 'self-validating', thus relieving subordinates of their social duties in the legitimation process, and as a consequence rendering unproblematic the orderly accomplishment of organisational tasks and goals.

Hopkins is evidently apprehensive about the institutional conception he has created, because he attempts to rationalise it by arguing that organisational members share values and norms that justify and define the authority system (Hopkins, 1969, p.180; cf. Bierstedt, 1974b) - an assertion about the social legitimacy of authoritative behaviour. This is not to say that *everybody* holds such values :

"Not all who occupy statuses in an authority system, however, need be members of the group whose values legitimate it. Aliens are not 'members' (citizens) of the country they are visiting, but they nevertheless occupy a definite status in relation to those who enforce the law. (Hopkins, 1969, p.180).

This comparison provides the insights necessary to unravel this new argument. Those in an organisation who do not consider the exercise of authority to be legitimate are not really "members" of the organisation at all, so there is no need to consult their opinions. Only those who belong to a group whose values legitimate the authority system are full participants, and they *by definition* subscribe to its validity. What of those "aliens" who do not legitimate bureaucratic authority? Since they are not "members" their views do not affect the system's legitimacy, but they nevertheless comply with authority because it is defined that they do so.<sup>36</sup> The empirical possibility and consequences of non-compliance are avoided as skilfully as Simon, Etzioni and Tannenbaum have done.

It is a sufficient condition for legitimacy that :

"... the ruling group and the administrative staff alone comprise the membership of the group whose values legitimate the authority system. (Hopkins, 1969, p.180).

By discounting the opinions and actions of those who do not consider the regime legitimate, Hopkins achieves an unhappy union of formal legitimacy with social legitimacy and of institutional authority with normative authority. If 'social legitimacy' is not to have its meaning devalued, Hopkins' effective conception of authority must be seen as institutional.

Hopkins' view shares much with that of Bierstadt (1974a and 1974b), who ties authority directly to *formal* organisation :

"It is in the formal organisation of associations that social power is institutionalised and transformed into authority. If social interaction proceeded wholly in accordance with the norms of its formal organisation, and if norms were always clear, the power would be dissolved without residue into authority". (Bierstedt, 1974a, p.232).

Both the formalism and the emphasis on compliance with formal commands as a recognition of authority are present, but, more interestingly, both authors find themselves driven by the logic of their arguments into sociologically untenable positions. Their various manoeuvres to disguise their institutional conceptions in *ex post facto* sociological rationalisations suggest that they are at least aware of some theoretical dilemma.

In contradistinction, other theories have employed the notion of authority in a *purely* formal capacity without pretension to a causal role in organisational life. Rationalisation is neither

offered nor necessary since the term 'authority' is restricted to a formally prescribed right or capacity. Pfiffner and Sherwood (1960) propose an institutional conception of authority, and argue that the "real power", associated with the actual capacity rather than the official right, to decide and supervise cannot be assumed to bear a close relationship to the formal hierarchy. This theoretical position has been put into operation in a number of sociological studies<sup>37</sup>, and may be seen as constituting the empirical basis of the sociological critique of the conventional view of the role of institutional authority in the organisational process.

In his comparative study of the "authorised" and "real power" structures of two U.S.A.F. operational units (wings), Thompson (1956) defined authority as :

"... that type of power which goes with position and is legitimated by the official norms." (Thompson, 1956, p.290).

Authority, in this perspective, is only a significant sociological factor to the extent that it becomes *power* and can potentially or actually influence people's behaviour. It does not pretend or aspire to be socially legitimate because it is only a 'real' phenomenon when commands issued from formal statuses in line with official norms shape subordinates' actions, *irrespective* of the actual basis of that power. First and foremost, authority belongs to the organisation as it hangs on the manager's wall, not as it operates in everyday life.

Thompson's research data compare the formal authority structures and the 'perceived power' structures in the two airforce units, and his interpretation confirms the expectation that purely institutional authority has little directly to do with the sociology of organisational power. The hypothesis :

"... that the real power structures in both wings would deviate from the more limited authority structures... can be accepted without reservation... It was also hypothesised that the real power structures of the two wings would differ from each other [in spite of sharing the same formal set-up] . This can also be accepted without reservation."  
(Thompson, 1956, p.297).

From a slightly different angle, Coser (1958) performs a similar comparative analysis of the formally prescribed authority structures and the "... *de facto* lines of decision-making..." (Coser, 1958, p.57) in two hospital wards.

This second variant of institutionalism is generally uncontroversial, because, with the sharp distinction between the formal (authority) and the actual (power), there is no attempt to broach the question of social legitimacy. The adequacy of these analyses therefore depends *not* on their conception of organisational authority, but on their view of organisational power.

A third institutional variant differs from the first two, which identify authority entirely with its formal origins in the organisational hierarchy, by extending the analysis of authority beyond its formal sources to other factors that condition it in the organisational situation. Formal authority has a sociological role to play, because it structures ongoing interpersonal relations (Presthus (1960, p.86), and proponents of this viewpoint, Presthus (1960) and Peabody (1961/62), are concerned with how authority becomes accepted by subordinates.

Presthus pursues this problem by constructing a typology of the bases of legitimation (à la Weber), in which 'formal position' is the prime, elemental basis that is a necessary though not sufficient condition of effective organisational authority. In order to control and channel the behavioural alternatives of participants, authority is formally allocated to positions which also carry

differential amounts of status, income and other perquisites that act as "... signals [which] define and reinforce authority." (Presthus, 1960, p.88)<sup>38</sup>. A second basis of legitimation - a "generalised deference to authority" - relates to a socially-induced personality factor whereby subordinates tend to comply with positional authority "as a rule". It appears to be appropriate to treat this factor as being merely one side of the coin on the other side of which is legitimacy by position - cf. Peabody's analysis (1961/62, p.468) of authorities of 'position' and of 'legitimacy' as being "inextricably fused" bases of formal authority.

Although formal position provides the primary basis of legitimation, it cannot be taken for granted as creating compliance :

"Authority seems more likely to be a contingent grant, received initially as part of formal position, but requiring nourishment from other kinds of legitimation as well" (Presthus, 1960, p.88).

The bases of the additional "nourishment" are legitimation by technical expertise and "rapport" with subordinates (i.e. human relations skills), which factors provide the sources of "functional authority" in Peabody's typology (1961/62).

Peabody begins from the same vision of organisational authority as Presthus, being "initially based" on formal position and its trappings but subject to modification by "several additional factors" (Peabody, 1961/62, p.465). Their agreement that formal position and associated factors are "initial" or prior to other sources leads to my classification of their view as "primarily institutional". The initial quota of (formal) authority has two interrelated bases, somewhat ambiguously called 'legitimacy' (in a narrower sense than Weber's or Presthus') and 'position'. 'Authority of position' is fairly clear, referring to that influence which derives from the office or formal status of the superior. 'Authority of legitimacy' emanates from the "legally established order", as Weber has expressed it.

Two problems arise from this distinction. First, the general confusion surrounding the term 'legitimacy' is not helped by Peabody's treatment of formal and social legitimacy as equivalent. This latter point emerges only in his empirical consideration of the 'types'.<sup>39</sup> It seems probable, however, that Peabody is *essentially* talking about formal legitimacy, since it does not make sociological sense, without a crass assumption about organisational consensus, to treat social legitimacy as a taken-for-granted "given" of institutional authority. The second problem is not so readily resolved; it is doubtful whether there is any substance in the distinction between authority of position and authority of legitimacy, since formal statuses and roles are defined with respect to the same rules, norms and values as those which one would expect to constitute the 'legal order'.

'Functional authority' includes 'authority of competence' and 'authority of person', and their sources are respectively technical/professional skills and social skills that presumably refer to factors "beyond the call of duty" which thereby can secure greater support for institutional authority (Peabody, 1961/62, p.470). This secondary form of organisational authority cannot be based upon formal legitimacy because it would then be covered by rules and not be "additional" to institutional authority. By deduction, therefore, functional authority must reflect a social legitimacy, but, while there is scant recognition of this, neither Presthus nor Peabody develop the analysis towards a genuine sociology of authority. It is notable that the theme of social legitimacy is most developed where they speak of pools of specialist competence and experience, the problems of professionals, conflicts between functional areas, and the dilemmas these *horizontal* problems pose for hierarchical - i.e. institutional - authority (Presthus, 1970, pp.88-89; Peabody, 1961/62, pp.470-471). It is evident that theorists find it easier to develop a meaningful sociology of organisational power on the lateral dimension - the sacrosanctity of hierarchical authority as a formal category of organisational life remains unviolated.

### 2.3.2 Hierarchical Authority and Social Legitimacy

There are very few studies of organisational authority which manage to shake off the prior linguistic commitment to formalism. Gouldner's (1954 and 1965) research on the effects of bureaucratisation on the organisation of a gypsum mine remains unchallenged as studies of the relationship between organisational authority and social legitimation. Gouldner commences from functionalist premises but, by virtue of this research method, provides important clues about organisational power.

In the mine, workers and supervisors had developed a mutually-agreed set of social norms regarding the application of formal rules (the "indulgency pattern") of which leniency was the dominant feature. A newly-appointed manager, concerned at the low productivity of the mine, took formal action, resting upon his official status in the organisational hierarchy, to end the indulgency pattern and to ensure strict enforcement of the formal rules. Although officially based, some of his actions were explicitly political, such as replacing the 'old guard' managers and supervisors who overtly supported the lenient application of rules, with new men who would 'tow' his formalist line (Gouldner, 1954, p.89ff.).

The resulting campaign to enforce the rules, an exercise in institutionally authoritative behaviour, attacked the socially-legitimate indulgency pattern and allowed, in return, no direct organisationally-constitutional course of action for protesting miners. The theorists above might theorise that exercise of institutional authority elicits compliance, but Gouldner's study suggests no such behaviour can be taken for granted. The latent conflict, created by the *socially* non-legitimate behaviour of the manager, was channelled into the only formally acceptable form of expression - a wage issue - and failure to reach a satisfactory settlement eventually led to a socially legitimated response : a wildcat strike (Gouldner, 1965, p.37).

"Legitimacy was denied the new management on a variety of grounds. It was denied ... because the *old* foremen's removal was considered illegitimate ... [For the workers] a legitimate supervisor is one who conforms to the indulgency pattern ... For those reasons ... [and other similar ones] the new management was not conceived of as legitimate, and workers' motivations to give it consent and obedience were further undermined". (Gouldner, 1965, pp.79-80).

In this way Gouldner points up the distinction between institutional authority and normative authority, and its relevance to the analysis of organisational power, conflict and politics is shown in varying degrees.<sup>40</sup>

### 2.3.3 Nonhierarchical Authority

The problem of organisational authority has generally been seen as a set of questions relating to organisational hierarchy. This is specifically because most writers, not having distinguished formal from social legitimacy, have for various reasons and in varying degrees identified authority with the institutional conception. More generally, however, they fail to consider the possibility that authority is anything other than hierarchical i.e. it tends to be defined *in terms of* hierarchy (e.g. Downs, 1967, p.52; contrast Miller's (1955) analysis of the cultural meanings of authority). Because 'hierarchy' itself, in an organisational context, carries the formal overtones inherited from everyday usage of the term, these two matters reinforce each other.

Despite the prevalent association of authority with organisational hierarchy, some authors have proposed that it be applied to the lateral aspects of organisational structure. It is unfortunate that such approaches have tended to confirm the institutionalist position, rather than exploit the liberation of the concept from its hierarchical shackles by exploring the normative conception.

Landsberger (1961/62) is concerned with the study of relationships between horizontal groups in the organisation, and his aim is to show that their

"... determinants ... are to be found in the nature of organisations themselves..."

(Landsberger, 1961/62, pp.302-303).

His aims lead him to investigate the causal role of 'objective' (or 'reality') factors rather than "organisational traditions and 'politics'" (1961/62, p.312), and his appreciation of organisational power and authority is thereby limited, for my purposes. Landsberger proposes no difference between horizontal and hierarchical authority as we have examined it above :

"... the whole concept of *authority* and its many subsidiary concepts [can] be applied systematically to horizontal relationships with suggestive modifications" (Landsberger, 1961/62, p.308).

Acceptance of horizontal authority is facilitated by those same factors that legitimate vertical authority viz. rules, competence and 'organisational logic' (1961/62, p.309), and these 'reality' factors largely explain the pattern of authority between groups. Authority on both dimensions has to be "institutionalised" (ibid.) i.e. allocated to positions and legitimated with reference to rules.

Thompson's (1960/61) concerns are much broader than Landsberger's, examining how the two structural dimensions of organisation (hierarchy and specialisation) interact to produce unavoidable conflict. Hierarchy is seen as the "principal system of authority in organisations" (Thompson, 1960/61, p.499), and authority is defined in purely institutional terms. Although institutional, compliance is unproblematic and authority is rendered socially legitimate by unexplicated sociological generalisations :

"... the roles of subordinate and superior ... are ... learned cultural patterns of behaviour transmitted from generation to generation ... The rights associated with hierarchical positions are cultural givens ..." (Thompson, 1960/61, p.486 and 488).

'Nonhierarchical authority' is created by the delegation of formal rights and duties to specialisms, according to the needs of the technical side of organisational reality. Although the formal rights to approve or "legitimate" decisions taken by delegates remain with the hierarchical superior, such decisions are often so technical that the superior is in no position to assess them. In such a situation a genuine non-hierarchical authority is established, effectively independent of hierarchical scrutiny, and legitimated with reference to those standards shared by members of the specialism in question. Unfortunately Thompson does not develop his theory to elaborate the relevance of these 'pools' of normative authority for a sociology of organisational power. Indeed the key defining characteristic of such authority is *not* the process whereby it is legitimated and accepted within the horizontal groups, but the fact that it has been formally devolved from the principal system of institutional authority.

The work of Landsberger and Thompson indicates once more the prior commitment that theorists have to the institutional, hierarchical notion. Independent of approach, with a few notable exceptions, the question of legitimation remains a formal one, and the process of acceptance is unexamined. In short, in spite of all the writing, the problem of organisational authority remains a sociological mystery, and the available conceptions reflect the "myths" of formal authority because they fail to comprehend how authority inspires the compliance which the notion itself presumes.

#### 2.4 The "Unitary" Approach to Organisational Power and Politics

The rationale underlying this chapter is that, since the study of power and authority is inextricably linked to an under-

standing of politics, the topic of this thesis must benefit from an examination of the available knowledge in the area of organisational 'power' (to use the word in inverted commas to serve as an umbrella term covering both power and authority.) Throughout the foregoing discussion it has become apparent that those contributors to the theory of organisational 'power' as it relates to the problem of order, have tended to develop, implicitly or explicitly, a (quasi-)systems conception of power or an institutional conception of authority. Ultimately, even behavioural definitions have dissolved into one of these two conceptions.

In this final section I shall examine some of the implications of these effective conceptions. I shall propose that the systems conception of power and the institutional conception of authority share certain features which make them logically compatible, and further that the way in which the conceptions have been employed theoretically renders them virtually indistinguishable from each other. In short, we are not talking about two cardinal conceptions but one dominant political approach to organisational order, viz. a "unitary" approach. I shall also argue that the internal logic of this dominant view precludes the meaningful study of organisational power and politics.

#### 2.4.1 Organisational 'Power' and the Formally Rational Achievement of Order

I shall compare on four points the systems conception of power and the institutional conception of authority, thereby indicating that these two conceptions, as used in 'hierarchical' theories, work in the same way to ensure that the problem of organisational order is resolved inadequately - the solution being formalistic, rationalistic and socially unmediated.

The first point is that both conceptions share the view that 'power' is allocated according to the needs/goals of the organisation, and the survival and/or effectiveness of organisational performance is bound up with the appropriate distribution of 'power'. Neither

view provides a sociological explanation of this allocation process (see the third point of comparison), thus inviting the criticism of reification, but they claim for 'power' an organisationally (i.e. formally) legitimate status based upon the "functionality" of its source, as reflected in its circumscription by the rules.

The second point of comparison is complementary to the first. The systems and institutional views involve, implicitly or explicitly, an assumption that 'power' is used to promote organisational order and fulfil the organisational needs which determine its functional allocation. Formal legitimacy is therefore further attributed to 'power' through the "functionality" of its use. The exponents of these conceptions do not distinguish between these two modes of ascribing legitimacy to organisational 'power', but it is noticeable that those with a sociological conscience have attempted to introduce by theoretical fiat a notion of social legitimacy e.g. by assuming or asserting a state of organisational consensus.

The successful introduction of an adequate notion of social legitimation has been inhibited by a third common characteristic of these two conceptions, viz. that they tend to abstract organisational 'power' from the concrete behaviour of social actors. We have already seen how these views divest organisational participants of the ability to allocate power, but this is merely a specific example of how social actors are deprived of an active role in the organisation's power system. For example, it has been pointed out that 'power' tends to be defined in behavioural terms so that compliance to formal commands becomes guaranteed; there exists further the tendency to assume that the organisational goals *are* the collective goals of the members, and that it is "rational" for lower participants to conform to the demands of 'power' holders (given also that 'power' is related to organisational goals by the functionality of its source and of its use). Both of these tendencies are features of the way these conceptions deal with the "impersonality" of 'power'. The institutional view envisages a structure of 'power' being established through the crystallisation of authority grants into formal positions or offices governed by organisational

regulations. Similarly the systems conception portrays 'power' as being attached to "generalised" social roles which are organisationally prescribed patterns of behaviour related to the needs of the system by the 'rational' process of structural differentiation and the formal process of institutionalisation. By agreeing that 'power' is attached to 'roles' or 'offices', both conceptions stress that "impersonality" and impartiality of organisational 'power'. 'Power'-wielding and obedience to it are role expectations and obligations of the superior and subordinate, so that people can perform such actions without prejudice to their standing as human beings - both the "rational" use of and the "rational" response to 'power' is thereby ensured. But "impersonal" has a second meaning in the context of the theory of organisational power viz. that the explanation of 'power' relations, and ultimately that of organisational order, becomes a matter which can be theoretically accounted for without recourse to the concrete actions of 'persons'. This "impersonality" ensures that 'power' behaviour in organisations proceeds without the interference of social actors, whose assumed compliance (their possible non-compliance falls outwith the remit of the approaches that adopt these conceptions) therefore confirms (and legitimates) what is already known about organisational 'power' from 'objective' categories like formal roles, rules, goals etc.

The depersonalising of the world of organisational power at the same time justifies and is justified by an 'objectivist' methodology the final point of comparison. The predominance of a "variable mentality" in certain schools of sociology has concerned a number of sociologists (e.g. Blumer, 1956), and the application or recommendation of a methodological strategy which seeks statistical relationships between 'objective', often a-sociological, variables have been the hallmarks of studies of organisational 'power' using the systemic and institutional conceptions. The concentration on objective variables, just as the formalist and structuralist frameworks which encourage it, leads to the neglect of the sociologist's task of understanding the social process which produces relationships between variables. The analysis consequently omits reference to power as a form of meaningful social action and reinforces the rationality of the theoretical strategy that recommended this omission.

The above four points together indicate that an internally consistent way of conceiving organisational 'power' derives more or less equally from both the systems and the institutional conceptions. In order to examine its potential contribution to the study of political process we need to understand the theoretical role that power has within this dominant approach. By defining power as a formal grant from the organisation, the approach either neglects other possible sources of 'power' within an organisation (cf. Mechanic, 1962) or relegates them to a level of secondary importance, merely modifying the formal distribution (e.g. Presthus, 1960). The significance of other bases of power is disregarded because of their lack of formal legitimacy, while the empirical possibility that power may work for other reasons (e.g. social legitimacy, or threats and promises of an unconstitutional type) and to other ends is discounted because such behaviour contravenes "what we know and recognise" as the typical features of formal organisation. To legislate that 'power' is only functionally/formally acquired and that its use is socially-neutral and organisationally-rational (and is *therefore* accepted), is at the same time to define organisational politics<sup>41</sup> out of existence. The same formalism that rules on the problem of legitimacy, that makes comprehensible organisational conflict (non-compliance) theoretically uninteresting and that encourages the static "variable mentality", turns organisational 'power' into a *technical* problem, not a political one.

Following Fox's numerous discussions of managerial ideology, the view of organisational power and politics implicit in the theories investigated above may be accurately described as "unitary" :

"A unitary system has one source of authority and one focus of loyalty, which is why it suggests the team analogy ... We expect ... [members] to strive jointly towards a common objective, each pulling his weight to the best of his ability. Each accepts his place and his function gladly, following the leadership of the one so appointed. There are no oppositionary groups or factions, and therefore no rival leaders within the team." (Fox, 1966, p.3).

According to Fox, many managers still theorise their organisational 'power' and lives in unitary terms; because the academic social scientists in this chapter have also theorised organisations and organisational 'power' as rational, neutral, authoritative and, when pushed, consensual - leaving aside the ideological implications of this compatibility between academic and everyday theorising - I shall in future refer to their theories as constituting the unitary approach to organisational power and politics.

#### 2.4.2 The Socio-Political Accomplishment of Organisational Order

To conclude this chapter, a few comments need to be made with respect to a number of issues which are raised by the foregoing discussion, and which bear fairly directly upon the political aspects of organisational order. Three matters seem especially to inhibit the development of a full awareness of the role of 'power' in the political process, but the first of these - the tendency to omit adequate reference to power as social action meaningfully constructed in relation to participants' goals - need not delay us; being a fundamental theme of the thesis, its case has been sufficiently promoted in Chapter One.

The second issue concerns the interrelationship of 'power' and politics in the context of the problem of organisational order. It will have become evident by now that the above literature on organisational 'power' shows a consistent relationship between 'order' and the hierarchical dimension of organisation. (In Chapter Three, I shall examine the complementary relationship between 'conflict' and the horizontal dimension). This association between 'power', hierarchy and organisational order has been highly resistant to any possible analysis in terms of political behaviour. There would appear to be two reasons for this resistance: the first, more obvious one, is the failure to associate hierarchy with social conflict; the second reason refers to the inability to consider that organisational order is itself a political accomplishment.

It is not of course necessary for there to be observable social conflict in order that political forces may exist (although it helps!). Where there is overt opposition between groups, as between Crozier's (1964) maintenance and production workers or between Goldner's (1970) I.R. and operations personnel (see 3.1), the existence of sectional interests and use of power for those interests become axiomatic theoretical adjuncts. This, after all, is the essential condition underpinning the role of power in Dahl's behavioural political theory (cf. Lukes, 1974, pp. 11 - 15). However as we shall see in Chapter Three, even those approaches which otherwise recognise and develop a theory of organisational power and conflict, fail to extend the propositions to hierarchy (cf. Lammers, 1969), the social condition of which thus becomes inexorably one of order. It would appear that the cultural implications of 'hierarchy' have become part of the sociology of organisations.

As mentioned above, conflict should not be considered as a *sine qua non* for a political notion of 'power'. Nevertheless the association of hierarchical 'power' with organisational order has become so taken-for-granted that this relationship has not been treated as a socio-political process. If order exists, the typical sociological reaction has been to *assume* that 'power' has worked as it should, as is formally prescribed; the corollary being that only when something untoward or unexpected occurs (i.e. when 'power' obviously did *not* work as prescribed) does the link between 'power' and organisational order become subject to critical sociological examination. A sociology of organisational 'power' cannot uncritically accept the surface phenomenon of order, by assuming that this order results from the realisation of prescribed 'power'. Organisational order therefore needs to be understood as a socio-political accomplishment, which is either negotiated in some fashion (cf. Strauss et al., 1963) or imposed by 'power'-holders in various (subtle or not) ways. An examination of organisational order through its relationships with social action and the structural context of that action, makes the notions of power and authority available for a political treatment of orderly states.

The third issue deserving attention in these concluding paragraphs about the relationship of 'power' and politics is that which arises from the language of everyday organisational life. In several places above, I have argued that in terms of a sociology of organisational power formal categories tend to restrict understanding, and that knowledge about the determinants and effects of 'power' in organisational life only becomes sociological where 'social' categories are used; this has been most obvious in the analysis of 'power' and legitimation. It has been noted, however, that such recommendations have not been heeded by the majority of theorists, whose predispositions towards the analysis of organisational life in terms of order, hierarchy and general formalism, have led to important shortcomings in their sociological vision. The reasons why this bias has occurred have emerged during the course of the chapter and they suggest fundamental lessons for the analysis of political process.

It is apparent that the academic theorising of organisational 'power' has relied tacitly upon the language of everyday organisational life, and, in doing so, has borrowed from this source *formal categories and their rationales of use*, which have been unreflectively introduced into its conceptual framework. In that sociology studies everyday life, it is impossible not to draw upon its language, but these loans have not been raised to the level of critical awareness. As a consequence, the sociologist's conceptions of organisational power, authority and legitimacy, especially with respect to hierarchy, resemble the views of those lay participants from whom the terminology was borrowed. In a sense, such unconscious reliance leads to a sociological theory of organisational power which merely replicates the common-sense theorising and idealising of certain members of the organisation - in most cases the organisational designers or the holders of institutional authority. Explanations of hierarchical power, legitimacy and organisational order reproduce lay knowledge, including the "myths" and "folklore" of organisational life.

The language of everyday organisational life is an important aspect in theorising organisational power and politics *because* it is

informative of the organisation's folklore, of what different groups at different levels "know" about their situations. However it not only reflects the political life of the organisation, it is also a *part* of that political life. The questions of whether the "myths" contained in formal categories are "true" or "false", and of how these "myths" differ from group to group, are relevant matters for a sociology of organisational power which does not *unquestioningly* import into its conceptual framework the categories and their rationales of use. It is a task for such a sociology to understand the "ideological service" (Krohn, 1971, p.130) that these "myths" perform in the political process, how they are used by various groups as a basis for defending or pursuing their interests. In short, the close relationships between organisational language and ideology, and between ideology and power, makes the unitary language of formalism, with its appeals to legitimacy and hierarchy that we have seen unreflectively reproduced in the aforementioned organisational theorising about 'power', a significant feature of the political process in organisations.

NOTES

1. The extensiveness and diversity of the literature in this area is indicated in some of the more remarkable attempts to survey the decision-making scene, e.g. Gore and Silander (1959) and Feldman and Kanter (1965).
2. This core of work comprises *Administrative Behaviour* (first published 1947); Second Edition 1957); *Models of Man* (a collection of previously published articles; 1957); *Organisations* (with J.G. March; 1958).

It is of interest that Simon's work shows some distinct lines of development, such that (for example) social factors receive more attention in the latter contribution cited above. In the 1960's his team of researchers gave the theory of decision-making a mathematical approach, very much reflecting Simon's other earlier interests in quantitative methodology (cf. almost any article reprinted in *Models of Man*).

3. Some of the theoretical contributions of Cyert and particularly March are considered in Chapter Three below, since their treatment of the business organisation is explicitly political.
4. As Simon readily acknowledges throughout his theoretical works, this conception originates (for the purposes of administrative theory) with Barnard (1938) :

"... acts of decision are characteristic of organisation behaviour as contrasted with individual behaviour, and ... the description of the processes of decision are relatively more important to the understanding of organisation behaviour than in the case of individuals". (Barnard, 1938, pp.186-187).

5. It must be understood that micro-economists themselves have subjected the conventional theory of the firm to much scrutiny, and have attempted to develop more appropriate theories. Under pressure for greater realism (e.g. Machlup, 1946; Papandreou, 1952; Baumol, 1959), the postulate of profit maximisation has undergone several metamorphoses - is the organisational goal 'profit', or is this only one of the several/many? (cf. Scitovsky, 1943; Cyert and March, 1963; Shubik, 1964). Is 'utility' a more useful or valid notion, and should it be imposed or inferred from behaviour? (cf. Samuelson, 1938). What are the difficulties in creating a "subjective utility index" as the organisational goal? (cf. Feather, 1964; Arrow, 1951; Little, 1957). Can such arguments about 'utility' actually explain the behaviour of organisational participants? (cf. Downs, 1967).

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Mathematical game theory (Von Neumann and Morgenstern, 1947; also Shubik, 1964) has also come to the aid of economists attempting to understand organisational decision-making as a conflict-resolution process without surrendering either the accepted economic wisdoms about rationality or the analytical power of closely-defined mathematical models. Social psychologists have attempted to analyse economic organisational behaviour in terms both of motivation theory (cf. Katona, 1951) and of coalition theory. Concerning the latter, Simmel's classic analysis of triadic relations (Wolff (ed.), 1950, Part II) started a rush of experiments in the 1950's and 1960's - e.g. Mills, 1953, 1954; Caplow, 1956, 1959; Vinacke and Ackoff, 1957; Gamsorn, 1961, 1962-3, 1964).

6. In a somewhat broader context, Pelz has called this the 'problem of social consciousness' (Pelz, 1974, p.1ff).
7. There is nothing remarkable about this analysis of the 'internal' psychological process of decision-making. For example, Lundberg (1964) sees three stages to such a process - "problem recognition", "using information" and "choice". The literature abounds with similar but alternative formulations e.g. Drucker (1955); Litchfield (1956); Gore (1956); March and Simon (1958); Morell (1958); Griffiths (1959).
8. It is important to note that, in Simon's analysis of organisational influence, obedience to and acceptance of authority are *not* separable phenomena. The consequences of this confusion are examined in 2.1.2.
9. This is related to Barnard's argument about a participant's "dual personality" in the organisation. Where he accepts the organisation's goal as his own, Barnard argues for the presence of an "organisation personality", in contradistinction to his "individual personality". (Barnard, 1938, p.88).
10. This is possibly tied up with Simon's increasing mathematical interests in his developing organisation theory, paired with the inevitable cultural predispositions.
11. I shall not consider directly the theory of inducements/ contributions in 2.1.2 below. This theory suffers from the same problem as many balance or exchange theories, in that it is difficult to give it any explanatory significance because in its general formulation it tends to be truistic.

In a very real sense, the possibility that a person will leave an organisation if he feels that he derives more from the organisation than he gives to it borders on meaninglessness. It might be argued that he would do so if another

11. (cont'd)

organisation offers an even greater favourable balance; but such an offer would then influence the balance of contributions/inducements in the first organisation as perceived by the person in question, such that the net balance would be seen as unfavourable.

Whichever way the case is argued, the principle of balance is unhelpful. If a person may leave with a net favourable balance, as a 'participation criterion', it is empirically unsound. If to stay in an organisation necessarily means that there is a favourable net balance, and that to leave is anyway indicative of an unfavourable net balance, the 'theory' does not explain anything - it must work.

12. Although these reasons may be seen sociologically as empirical propositions, open to investigation, within the framework of Simon's total theory, they are the status of unquestioned assumptions.
13. It is his insights in this area that have formed the basis of his unremitting criticism of the conventional micro-economic theory of the firm. (See Simon, 1957a, Ch.5; 1957b, Ch.10 and pp.196-206; March and Simon, 1958, Ch.6).
14. From a different perspective, Lindblom has investigated rather more fully the difference between objective rationality in decision-making, and what actually happens. The "maximising" position, called the "Rational-Comprehensive Method" (Lindblom, 1964), or the "Synoptic Ideal" (Braybrooke and Lindblom, 1963) is argued to be not only humanly impossible (except in special circumstances, see Braybrooke and Lindblom, 1963, pp.78-79) but also unrelated to the reality of the decision-making process. The more realistic view which Lindblom has most developed, he calls the "Method of Successive Limited Comparisons" (Lindblom, 1964) or "Disjointed Incrementalism" (Braybrooke and Lindblom, 1963), and may be seen as giving some support to the "satisficing" concept. It is interesting to note that Lindblom sees decision-making as a social activity to a larger extent than does Simon.
15. Simon would not deny that his theory is mostly derived from psychology, but it is argued here that there is an over-dependence on this level of analysis, so that even phenomena which are clearly not psychological are reduced to the study of the individual, or to assumptions about the individual.
16. This is especially developed after the first edition of *Administrative Behaviour*. For example, 1957b, Chs. 14 and 15; (March and Simon, 1958, Ch.3).
17. Whilst the conceptualisation of decision process necessarily constrains the explanatory role of social factors in the

17. (cont'd)

total theory, Simon did *choose* to develop a general psychological approach, with a comparable neglect of sociology. His attitude towards sociology, made clear in his observations in the Preface to the Second Edition of *Administrative Behaviour* appears to be unfavourable, so the subsequent bias is not surprising.

18. For a different but related analysis of the theoretical consequences of a behavioural version of "operationalism", see Clegg's discussion (1975, p.20ff) of Dahl's approach.

19. This distinction refers back to arguments put forward in 1.2.2.

20. I write "to a lesser extent", because Simon's notion of "identification" partly covers "normative power".

21. This argument is developed further in Chapters Eight and Nine below.

22. In doing so, this confusion over the meaning of "legitimacy" (is it 'formal' or 'social'?) lends a fictional support to the image of the organisation as a cooperative system with little conflict. (see also 2.4 below).

23. The idea of the organisation as comprising a plurality of interacting rationalities is now new. Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939) distinguish between the "logics" of management and worker behaviour and their idea is taken up and developed in Roy's classic participant observation studies (especially 1969).

24. A fourth type, "interorganisational" conflict, is omitted from our analysis here, since it relates only indirectly to the internal process of the organisation.

25. Unless the organisation is reified, and Simon vehemently denies this in a variety of places (e.g. 1957a, p.17 and p.107).

26. Parsons, as we have seen in 1.2.1, associated 'power' with his 'political' or 'goal attainment' subsystem, so that he would clearly distinguish between 'power' and 'social control'. Millham et al (1972) do not take up this distinction.

27. This would be anathema to Dahl and his behavioural political scientists.

28. In 1965, Etzioni placed different labels on the latter two types (utilitarian and identitive), but does not indicate that this affects his earlier work.

29. This ambiguity even exists on the same page e.g. 1961, p.12, in which power and involvement are said to "constitute" the compliance relationship (this word itself could refer to a creative act, or to the descriptive form of compliance), whereas the ensuing discussion implies that compliance emerges from a given relationship between power and involvement.
30. This 'congruence' occurs as a matter of definition, since types of organisational involvement are defined with reference to types of power, so it should be clearly recognised that the distinction between congruent and incongruent types of compliance is not a theoretical discovery.
31. This is the nub of Cohen's simple logical defense in functionalism against the criticism that by concentrating on social order it cannot explain social change. (1968, pp.57-8).
32. This neglect of subordinate's behaviour by focusing upon their attitudes only, leads to an effective conception of power similar to both Tannenbaum's and Simon's - although the latter theorists accomplish unquestioned compliance / conformity/acceptance through their behavioural definitions.
33. Ultimately, the empirical relevance of the postulate of organisational effectiveness becomes a necessary condition for the explanatory value of Etzioni's theory. Many managerial theories of organisational behaviour are also underpinned by a postulate of effectiveness, e.g. Lawrence and Lorsch's (1967) and Woodward's (1965) theories only have explanatory value for "successful" firms.
34. In section 2.4 below, I suggest that the systems conception of power and the institutional conception of authority are essentially compatible.
35. This attribution occurs through some rather unethical manipulations of Weber's writings :

"For Weber, authority of any kind is exercised when a given order is obeyed, when the recipient's action 'follows in essentials such a course that the content of the command may be taken to have become the basis of action for its own sake'" (Hopkins, p.171; quoting Weber, 1964, p.327).

Hopkins fails to clarify that Weber's quotation refers to a definition of 'obedience', and in no way relates to an assertion that authority necessarily involves compliance. As we saw in Chapter One Weber defines authority in terms of the (social) legitimacy to which subordinates orient their action (Weber, 1964, p.324ff), and to orient one's action towards the legitimacy of authority by no means ensures conformity with its prescriptions (Weber, 1964, p.125).

36. It might make sociological sense to describe the "aliens'" relationship to "authority" as one of 'power', but an institutional view with a behavioural definition is insensitive to such a distinction.
37. The distinction between formal authority and the "actual ability to influence" has also been fundamental to social psychological and human relations approaches to organisational leadership, e.g. Bennis et al., 1958, p.144.
38. It is informative to contrast this with V. Thompson's (1960/1, p.509) view. For the latter, the same trappings of authority that Presthus sees as validating its positional legitimacy, Thompson argues constitute a frequent source of conflict. These respective viewpoints may be seen as reflecting an organisational equivalent to the famous debate on the functionalist theory of social stratification.
39. The following interviewee's responses are both taken to reflect 'authority of legitimacy' :
- a) "Authority to me is something you're bound to respect. It's something I respect."
  - b) "A lot of authority is in the manual - it's the law".

The first statement is typical of 'social legitimacy', and is not necessarily bound to formal position. Conversely, the second statement smacks of 'institutional authority', and implies no respect for or agreement with "the manual".

40. Roy's (1969) study of the reactions of shopfloor groups to formally imposed systems of rules demonstrates the same kinds of issue, although the problem of organisational authority is not broached directly.
41. For Parsons, of course, political behaviour is socially neutral and organisationally rational, for it concerns the attainment of goals. The effect of using the term 'politics' to refer to such behaviour is also to make politics in my sense theoretically unavailable.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ORGANISATIONAL CONFLICT : POWER AND POLITICS

The dominant way in which organisational order has been academically theorised - whether in the consideration of decision-making, control, compliance or authority - has been through a unitary type of approach that stresses power as a formal, rational organisational resource allocated hierarchically and used functionally. In the present chapter I shall be examining two variants of a general type of approach which theorises, explicitly or implicitly, the political aspects of organisational life by investigating the causes of the "actual" power structure and the latter's relationship to the most obvious manifestation of politics - viz. social conflict. Very broadly, this type of approach, which in 3.3 I shall liken to Fox's "pluralist" frame of reference, is concerned with the relationship between power and conflict as they are grounded in the structural and functional interdependence of organisational process. These aims lead to the view that the important power-holders are not hierarchical statuses but structural and functional units, and, since power differences can thus exist between formal equals, the theory of "horizontal" power has implications for the study of organisational conflict.

The first variant of this approach to horizontal power relationships - the study of interdepartmental power - includes as representatives the works of Crozier (1964), Goldner (1970), Perrow (1970b) and Hickson et al. (1971). The second variant is distinctive because it brings together a number of diverse theories which overtly claim to examine the organisation as a "political" unit. As in Chapter Two, the aim is to conduct a critical examination of these theories in order to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of their effective conceptions of organisational power and politics. I shall conclude the chapter by sketching a picture of this type of approach.

### 3.1 Interdepartmental Power and Organisational Conflict

Although the following approaches share structural-functional premises, it is fruitful to distinguish between studies according to the research methods used or advocated. From the viewpoint of general relevance to this thesis, those studies using "qualitative" methods have produced data of greater worth than the "quantitative" studies of power, and the reasons for this will become evident as we progress. Crozier (1964) and Goldner (1970) are examples of the former, and Perrow (1970b) and Hickson et al. (1971) exemplify the latter approach.

#### 3.1.1 The Qualitative Approach

Crozier's study (1964) of power relationships within an industrial tobacco monopoly is not only important in its own right, but may be seen as the intellectual predecessor of the other studies in this tradition. The organisation is conceived as a formal setting in which the coexistence of a number of occupational groups is a major problem, and whose interdependence is built into the logic of the organisational process. Crozier appeals to a 'neo-rationalist' analysis of organisational power and conflict (1964, p.149ff.) in order to overcome the "sentimentalist", "non-rational" arguments of the human relations tradition.

"Subordinates can be considered as free agents, who can discuss their own problems and bargain about them, who do not only submit to a power structure but also participate in that structure. Of course, their degree of freedom is not very great, and their conduct, when viewed from the outside, may seem to a large extent to be determined by non-rational motivations. *But one must never forget that to them it is rational i.e. adaptive.*" (Crozier, 1964, p.150; my emphasis).

Organisational participants, by virtue of their membership of occupational (i.e. horizontal) groupings, hold describable positions in

the organisation and face the fundamental problem of 'adapting' to the circumstances (including the structures of power, status and work) they experience. 'Neo-rationalist' analysis needs to answer a quasi-ethnomethodological question : how do different groupings make sense of and learn to live with *their* own position and the problems it poses?

Crozier suggests that each group develops rational techniques or modes of adaptation to their specific situation, and these 'strategies'<sup>1</sup> being related to the daily needs of particular occupational groups, delineate the orientation of their members to other groups in the organisation. Differences in the amount of control one has over one's own daily life - the organisation's power structure - constitute a significant parameter of one's problematic organisational experiences.

What is power and what are its organisational sources? Although Crozier directly cites Dahl's (1957) overworked definition (Crozier, 1964, pp.156-157) there is no doubt that his analysis of organisational power is not behaviourist.<sup>2</sup> Crozier develops his view by introducing what he believes are two critical power-related notions - 'uncertainty' and 'dependence'. Degrees of dependence between groups are inherent in the structural-functional nature of organisational reality, but the notion of prior significance is 'uncertainty'.

Uncertainty may enter the organisational process from a variety of sources both internal and external to the organisation,<sup>3</sup> but, whatever its source, it poses a major *functional* problem for the controlling elite - it must be "coped with" (Thompson, 1967, p.13) at a minimal level. In Crozier's industrial monopoly, the main source of uncertainty in an organisation otherwise characterised by routine and predictability was the technical system, which for unknown reasons, was persistently breaking down. By virtue of their skills and ability to cope with technological problems, the maintenance workers found themselves in a key position from which they could derive immense strength.

Key position is converted into organisational power because it alters the formally equal state of interdependence amongst groups; in short, it allows a group to achieve greater autonomy from the organisational constraints whilst increasing *other* groups' dependence on them.<sup>4</sup> When organisationally-created uncertainties reshape the formal pattern of interdependence, each group must adapt to the reality of horizontal power relations and they do so by developing 'strategies' as outlined above.

The conception of power that emerges from Crozier's analysis is a hybrid systems/exchange notion. Power certainly has systemic, though not formal, origins, since it is attributed to groups of greatest 'functional importance' (cf. Dubin, 1960, p.506ff.) in the service of organisational goals - those groups which "cope with" uncertainty. Although it is grounded abstractly in the logic of the organisation, the actual distribution of power reflects the structural state of exchange between groupings - power accrues to that group which can maximise independence from others whilst simultaneously making others dependent on it (cf. Blau, 1964, p.118).

The major sociological impact of Crozier's approach is that organisational conflict - "dominant patterns of opposition" (1964, p.118) - is seen as an inevitable characteristic of horizontal power relationships.

"In the presence of a balance of power peculiar to this organisation, the opposition between maintenance and production ... is at the root of our main conflict."  
(Crozier, 1964, p.140).

Conflict, in spite of its central importance to Crozier's arguments, remains a fairly intuitive concept, the major indicators of which are signs of tension, personal criticisms and aggressive tones of voice. Such factors may, of course, reflect a situation of conflict, both latent and manifest, but the concept of conflict itself is largely underdeveloped. Crozier explains even less adequately the nature of the relationship between power and conflict. At one stage he states

"At the root of all the conflicts we have analysed, there is clearly some kind of fight for power" (Crozier, 1964, p.139).

But the link between power and conflict is crucial in the sociological theory Crozier is proposing, and, although a rationale could be constructed using his own concepts, this link remains unarticulated.

Goldner (1970) starts from the proposition that organisational power should be seen as being rooted in the operational relationships and issues that inevitably develop between functional units in the organisation's division of labour. This concern with horizontal power relations and the use of qualitative data ties Goldner to the same general themes as Crozier had examined. Taking the Industrial Relations (IR) Unit of a company as the focal point of analysis, Goldner investigates its relations with other functional groups, especially Operations Management (OM). Like Crozier he develops a systems/exchange conception of power, in which IR's power in the organisation derives from its ability to control ambiguities and uncertainties, and at the same time maintain relative independence from the organisational control structure. In addition, Goldner explicates a concept of conflict, also grounded in organisational structure and functioning, and elaborates its association with power.

The organisational power of IR results from its role in the 'organisation of uncertainty', and the organisational circumstances which allow it to rise above the formal state of functional interdependence. Goldner's analysis provides comprehensive documentation of this process.

"Industrial Relations' most important tasks were those dealing with the unions : negotiating union-management agreements, handling worker grievances ... and the day-to-day interpretation of all issues covered in the agreement". (Goldner, 1970, pp.99-100).

In its relationship with OM, its power depended upon its "expertise" in knowing and *especially interpreting* union agreements.

"... mere possession of knowledge is not enough. It must be augmented by control over the application of this knowledge. Time and again the IR personnel attempted to convince others that clauses were not to be taken literally. The union-management agreement had to be interpreted to be understood" (Goldner, 1970, pp.126-127).

It was *only* IR personnel who could clarify the esoteric nature of the agreement - it could thus handle the uncertainties created by unionisation of the labour force.

Due to organisational circumstances, its work not only was relatively autonomous of organisational controls, but also ensured that sectors of the organisation became dependent on it. Because the IR unit was only a local branch of a centralised function, operating in an otherwise decentralised company, it was not subject to the normal internal system of authority : furthermore, unlike other departments, its productivity and efficiency was not open to direct assessment (Goldner, 1970, pp.127-128 and 130-132). At the same time as promoting autonomy, IR's functions placed it in key intermediary structural positions, being the only means of access to the union, as well as mediating between certain departments (Goldner, 1970, pp.125-126 and 128-130); thus other departments could only function adequately with IR's aid.

Goldner's analysis supports Crozier's interpretation of the causes of organisational power. He goes further by relating conflict to power, not as one being conditional of the other, but because they are both derivable from the structural and functional conditions of the organisation.

Conflict may occur where ambiguities exist over functional responsibilities, such that each group perceives a task to be its

own, with the result that the "other" group is trespassing. Trespass of this sort is likely to lead to more conflict where one group has historically suffered a rapid loss of self control. The relationship between IR and OM illustrates such circumstances, in which conflict was exacerbated by historical factors. In this situation, power and conflict are both created by organisational circumstances and they interact together within the context of functional relationships.

### 3.1.2 The "Quantitative" Approach

Within a quantitative tradition, Perrow's study of departmental power in twelve industrial firms (1970b), deals with the power relationships of four functional groupings - sales, production, R & D and "staff services". Data are obtained by the use of self-filling questionnaires, and his measure of power, like Tannenbaum's (1968), is reputational. The collation of the various individual rankings of the different functional groups produces group measures, from the comparison of which is inferred a "pattern of group dominance". As with Tannenbaum, Perrow is therefore really providing information about *perceptions* of the power structure (that is, assuming his participants responded to a common notion of 'power' rather than their own lay interpretations - cf. Thompson, 1970b, p.91), although he treats these 'perceptions' as *if* they were simple reflections of 'reality'.<sup>5</sup>

Perrow's results indicate a pattern of "sales-domination", which he largely attributes to the sales departments' key role in dealing with the major problems facing industrial firms in the U.S. - those problems deriving from the nation's market economy :

"As a link between the customer and the producer, it [i.e. sales] absorbs most of the uncertainty about the diffuse and changing environment of customers." (Perrow, 1970b, p.65).

In short, sales acquires its power because it performs the more "critical function" for the organisation (1970b, p.66) - power is functionally and systematically allocated.

Perrow's quantitative approach does not allow him to offer information about the power relationships between departments or how uncertainty absorption is "converted" into organisational power.<sup>6</sup> Instead his attention is drawn to a comparative study of his data in search of those organisational variables which might predict variation in the degree of sales-domination. This investigation reflects Perrow's subscription to the structuralist 'task analysis' approach (Perrow, 1967), seeking statistical relationships among contemporaneous non-social factors (cf. Thompson, 1970b, p.90), such as technology and task-related variables, rather than looking at how power is used and maintained by social actors in the organisational situation. It is in such affairs that the crucial difference between Crozier and Perrow is highlighted.

The horizontal approach to organisational power finds its most formal theoretical statement in the exposition of a "strategic contingencies' theory" of intraorganisational power by Hickson et al. (1971; see also Hinings et al., 1974). Of the four major works in this tradition, this is the only purely theoretical approach, but with its obvious concern with measurement of variables it is best classified alongside Perrow's work. Hickson et al. look at the structural and functional sources of power, and, with Perrow, deliberately abstract from the role of social actors :

"... when organisations are treated as interdepartmental systems, the division of labour becomes the ultimate source of intraorganisational power, and power is explained by variables that are elements of each sub-unit's task, its functioning, and its links with the activities of other subunits." (Hickson et al., 1971, p.217).

The elaboration of the now-familiar basic logic takes the form of a highly formalised framework for a strictly structural analysis of organisational power.

At various stages of the exposition, the authors invoke each of the three conceptions of power outlined in Chapter One. They commence from Dahl's (1957) behavioural conception, proposing with Tannenbaum (1968) the "power is social causation" thesis (cf. Martin, 1971, p.241), which they place within a functionalist framework in order to elucidate its sources within the organisational context. Power is distributed in accordance with the functional contributions of a subunit with respect to reducing uncertainties for the organisation and its other subunits. Such a subunit will acquire all the more power if it is central to the organisation, and makes itself irreplaceable.<sup>7</sup> In order to progress to the explanation of the pattern of power relationships, Hickson et al. enlist the help of the exchange notion with its associated idea of dependence.

'Contingencies' are defined as the operational requirements of any subunit that is affected by another subunit (which, given the premise of functional interdependence, must be so). Contingencies are strategic when they become controlled by some subunit whose actions/services are, to some unspecified degree, difficult to replace, and whose position in the organisation is, to an equally unspecified degree, central. At this stage, the raw behavioural conception of power, which took on a functional guise in the search for the organisational conditions of power, becomes an exchange concept for the purpose of determining a horizontal pecking-order :

"... subunits can be seen as exchanging control of strategic contingencies one for the other under the normative regulation of the encompassing system social system, and acquiring power in the system through the exchange" (Hickson et al., 1971, p.222).

The accumulation of net credits in the abstract exchange process presumably accounts for the differentiation of power, but how the exchange analogy (for that is all it can be) works, and what its theoretical status is, remains unexplicated.

The formal theory, stripped of its elaborate rationales, is quite simple :

"... differential subunit powers [is explained] by dependence on contingencies ensuing from various combinations of coping with uncertainty, substitutability, and centrality". (Hickson et al., 1971, p.227).

Those last three factors (the independent variables) are themselves a (mathematical) function of the goals, outputs, technologies and markets of organisations (ibid) - a similar set of factors to those proposed by Perrow (1970b).

### 3.1.3 Organisational 'Power', Conflict and Order

I have examined two types of approach to the question of interdepartmental power, both of which use the same basic logic, share the same types of concepts, and employ a mixture of functionalist and exchange conceptions of power. Both approaches argue that power is grounded in the operational needs or logic of the organisation and is allocated to structural units for their part in handling or reducing uncertainty. In this view power is not fixed by formal dictate, but, as in the primitive exchange conception, is more or less emergent as structural units compete to maintain states of dependence and independence. In spite of these shared qualities, the contributions of the two types of approach to understanding the role of power in organisational life differ in importance mainly because of the different modes of enquiry adopted or recommended. For Perrow and Hickson et al., the theory of organisational power is largely a formal conjunction of 'objective' variables, to be measured and prepared for statistical analysis. They are structural in the sense of abstracting totally from the meaningful activities of social actors. As a result, their contributions are more or less technical exercises, not sociological analyses. They would agree that power is a social phenomenon; but they concentrate on 'objective' factors which cannot *by themselves* explain (sociologically) a social phenomenon without untenable assumptions about the passivity

of *homo sapiens*. The interview/observation methods of Crozier and Goldner ensure that man is not rendered impotent by fiat, and both provide fine illustrations of how individuals and groups handle 'power' to serve their own, but more especially their group's interests.

Taking the two variants of this approach together, it is important to understand the limitations they impose on the development of a realistic image of organisational power and politics. I shall briefly look at their (often implicit) views of power, politics, authority, conflict and order.

These theorists provide a conception of organisational power which is superior, from the perspective of understanding political behaviour, to that supplied through the hierarchical approach. By avoiding the assumption that power, however created, is used for collective aims, it becomes possible to admit into the framework the notion of sectional interests - in Crozier's work this is represented by group strategies, while Perrow speaks of departmental perspectives. This in turn serves as a basis of a theory of organisational conflict. All representatives of the horizontal viewpoint, however, cling to the proposition that departmental or group power has functional sources and is functionally allocated. This stance prevents a deeper understanding of the role of power in organisational politics and, paradoxically, arguments and evidence from the researchers themselves provide fuel for a more flexible interpretation. Perrow (1970, p.67) speaks of a "distortion thesis" whereby groups manipulate areas and degrees of uncertainty so as to create or maintain power independently of the "naturally" or "technologically" induced problems of the organisation. Both Crozier and Goldner cite instances of just such distortion without developing the implications for their view of power and politics.

The theorists' stress on the horizontal dimension and functional power rather than prescribed power tends to overshadow any analysis of authority, and yet when they do need to resort to the vertical aspects of organisation their arguments reflect the traditional

formalist notions associated with hierarchy. Hickson et al. (1971, p.218), for example, define authority as 'positional power' (cf. Presthus, 1960; Peabody, 1961/62; see above 2.3.1) and argue that it is legitimate because it is :

"... normatively expected by some selection of role definers". (Hickson et al., 1971, p.218).

Since at the same time authority, for subunits, would define

"... the formally specified range of activities that they are officially required to undertake, and, therefore, to decide upon". (ibid.),

they provide a good example of an institutional conception.<sup>8</sup>

Crozier (1964, p.165 ff.) conceives of the organisational hierarchy as providing some of the major constraints acting on horizontal power relationships which might otherwise threaten the attainment of organisation's overall goals. Power struggles between functional groups must be kept within limits, and therefore :

"... certain individuals must be given enough freedom of action to be able to adjust conflicting aims and to impose decisions about general development... In order to obtain the necessary freedom of action, the *manager* will have to have a power over his subordinates, formal power to make decisions as a last recourse, and informal power to bargain with each individual and each group to persuade them to accept his decisions". (Crozier, 1964, p.163).

Both the formal power and the informal power derive their strength from the making and application of 'institutionalised' rules, as it is evident that the hierarchical role is one of imposing discipline on and arbitrating between conflicting claims of functional groups.

Whereas power on the horizontal dimension is derived from the (possibly changing) operational needs of the organisation, employed within the context of group strategies and associated with struggle and conflict, hierarchical power reflects formal prescriptions, is used for the furtherance of organisational ends, and thus is tied to notions of harmony and conflict-resolution.

It is not clear why Crozier and Hickson et al. should see organisational power in the vertical aspects as being radically different from its interdepartmental manifestations, except that this view reflects our cultural predisposition to associate hierarchy with authority, and authority with impartiality, impersonality and formality (cf. Miller, 1955) but nevertheless the resulting view is of management (i.e. hierarchical roles) as co-ordinators of "key organisational bargains" (Rico, 1969, p.655).

This image of many groups competing under the impartial auspices of management has wider implications for the development of a theory of organisational politics. If the range and scope of organisational power relationships and conflict are circumscribed by the (assumed) arbitrating, neutral actions of formally prescribed power holders and other more general social forces (Crozier, 1964, p.176 ff), we not only have a very restrictive view of managerial behaviour (no doubt a view to which managers themselves would subscribe, and one to which they may appeal for social legitimacy), but also a conception of the organisation which approximates to pluralism (with its own ideological appeal). Crozier's formulation, for example, shares many of the major features of the conventional pluralistic approach to power systems. The tendency to define power relations in terms of conflict either for conceptual reasons (cf. Blumer, 1954, p.235) or for purposes of identification (cf. Dahl, 1971, p.358-359; see also Lukes, 1974, p.13); the tendency to see conflicting groups as essentially defensive or protective of their own positions or privileges (cf. Riesman, 1953; see also Kornhauser, 1966); third the presumption that the organisation maintains a state of order by virtue of the opposition

of groups, as present in Crozier's notion of a "conflictive equilibrium". Further analysis of this connection, and of its implications for a theory of organisational power and politics, takes place in 3.3. below.

As we have seen, in Crozier's case, organisational order is ultimately maintained by the actions of the hierarchy, but *how* the operation of hierarchical power operates to maintain such a state of order is never explained - its operation is simply assumed. It is not in question that there may exist inbuilt strains towards order from the hierarchy - call it the "mobilisation of bias" (cf. Bachrach and Baratz, 1971) or a deep "structure of dominance" (cf. Clegg, 1975, p.61 ff.; see 4.2) - but attempts to impose theoretically or conceptually a state of order on the organisation, without adequate sociological rationales behind them, must be resisted. Collectively these theorists employ unsatisfactory assumptions or assertions in order to rationalise the accomplishment of a "conflictive equilibrium" e.g. the methodological eradication of social actors; Crozier's assumed 'organisational loyalties' of managers, in spite of such an assumption running contrary to his argument about group strategies; the abstract proposition that the framework of the "normative regulation of an encompassing social system" (Hickson et al, 1971, p.222).

To summarise, these authors have effectively imported into their developed horizontal theory of organisational conflict, some of the major weaknesses of the hierarchical theory of organisational order. As a result their approach acquires a vertical organisational dimension of 'power', albeit by ad hoc conceptual grafting rather than by sociological theorising (cf. Clegg, 1977, p.26); they also discover a way of reconciling their interest in conflict with their functionalist premises and predilections viz. "the hierarchy", and the formal concepts and reasoning of everyday organisational life with which it is impregnated, provide the impartial means whereby organisational activities may be ultimately tied to organisational order ("balance") *in spite of* interdepartmental squabbles. Conflict and change of any consequence are ruled out.

### 3.2 Political Models of the Organisation

A recurring point of wonder throughout this thesis is that, in the conventional literature, social scientists have shown a remarkable degree of resistance to conceiving the organisation in explicitly *political* terms. Long, in a now classic statement of the problem, suggests :

"People will readily admit that governments are organisations. The converse - that organisations are governments - is equally true but rarely considered" (Long, 1962, p.110).

Long argues that this view is prevalent amongst students of public and private administration, but believes, incorrectly, that sociologists and economists are more likely to characterise the organisation politically. It has been noted that even those sociologists who develop a theory of organisational power do not in general move beyond a structural/static view of power relations to examine the implications of *how* power is used. This latter task constitutes the significant first step into the realm of organisational politics.

In spite of this general neglect of the topic, however, there have been a few specific attempts to portray the organisation in political terms, and it is the purpose of this present section to investigate and evaluate these attempts. The political aspects of organisational behaviour have been analysed within a number of broader theoretical frameworks, and the majority may be understood as attempts to develop those approaches considered to date. As this section unfolds, it will become increasingly apparent that these political models tend to resemble, in significant respects, the interdepartmental power approach, and that these two approaches can, for the purposes of this thesis, be considered as variations on one major - pluralist - theme.

The four parts of this section are concerned with the explanation and critical discussion of distinct and explicitly 'political'

approaches to the study of organisations. In each case, the first part of the section is devoted to outlining these approaches as they relate to the topic of this thesis; the second part of each section involves an examination and evaluation of the image and theory of organisational power and politics which are located with the framework in question.

### 3.2.1 Politics and the Organisational Sub-system

(a) In Chapter One, I spoke of the dominant conceptions of power which have informed the sociology of organisations in recent times. Among these was the 'systems' conception of power which was abstracted from the works of Talcott Parsons. This view of power, when placed in an organisational context, carries with it a view of organisational politics as an analytical sub-system of the organisation *qua* social system.

The Parsonian conception of political behaviour in organisation derives from his analysis of the four functional problems that confront any system, and the political sub-system arises in response to the need for the organisation to attain its goal(s). Parsons describes a number of concrete activities/functions which constitute the political sub-system, but there is

"... an important sense in which the focus of all these functions is the process ordinarily called 'decision-making'" (Parsons, 1956, p.75).

Organisational decision-making can be considered as comprising three sets of decisions, concerning the establishment of policies, the allocating of resources to implement policies and co-ordination and integration of the organisational effort (*ibid.* p.75 ff.), each of which is closely tied to the organisational goals; furthermore, these activities of concrete individuals and sub-units are bound to this systemic logic by their commitment to the authority and legitimacy of the value-system. As mentioned in Chapter One, power is the currency of the political sub-system (Parsons, 1967), and,

as an organisational resource tied (by definition) to the achievement of organisational goals, the use of power to mobilise resources (i.e. politics) is uncontentious, neutral, rational, and both formally and socially legitimate.

Within the context of the present thesis, the view of organisational politics offered by Parsons is unhelpful as it conceals many of the nuances of such behaviour by a number of highly restrictive assumptions. However, the analytical advantages of the systems approach in general has attracted sociologists to persist, and Zald (1970) in particular has developed the systems conception of organisational politics with his so-called 'Political-Economy' framework.

"Starting from analogies to the nation-state and national economies, the political-economy framework focuses on the intersection of the polity structure and political life in organisations with the economy and economic life within organisations". (Zald, 1970, p.221).

Relative to Parsons, Zald may be seen as expanding the analysis of the functional problems of goal-attainment and adaptation and considering all other problems (including Parsons' problems of integration and latency) only in their relation to these instrumental matters.<sup>9</sup>

Zald's framework stresses the political and economic aspects of the organisation as they interconnect and as they relate to the political and economic aspects of the environment. It is these two concerns with the analytical distinction between, first, political and economic life, and, second, the organisation and its environment, which primarily allies Zald to the systems approach, and his major theoretical goal is to unravel the systemic relationships between the internal and external, political and economic structures and processes.

Zald's analysis of organisational politics as such is most easily abstracted from his more comprehensive view by examining his theoretical insights in a number of stages. First, he makes several propositions about the internal political system and its operation within the normative order of the organisation; from these propositions it is possible to discern the essential characteristics of organisational politics. Second, it is necessary to investigate the nature of the relationship between political life and economic life in the organisation, for the credibility of the political-economy perspective on organisational politics depends crucially upon this interaction. Third, and most broadly, we need to look at Zald's analysis of the relationship between external factors and internal political behaviour.

Zald commences from the conventional systems view that the polity refers

"... only to those groups or positions having an active and somewhat organised influence in the process of decision-making". (Zald, 1970, p.229, n.1).

The political system is thereby a 'power system' relating to the making of organisational decisions, but his analysis is certainly less restrictive than the conventional Parsonian view because, in addition to the "institutionalised and authoritative patterns of decision control", it also examines

"... the less regular and even 'illegitimate', but systematic, influence processes". (Zald, 1970, p.230).

Organisational power is no longer authoritative by definition, and may be used to pursue personal ends as well as collective ones (Zald, 1970, p.237), but the political-economy approach views power only in a (formal) decision-making context, being wielded by organised, active interest groups.

This last image is further elaborated in Zald's analysis of the central feature of organisational politics, viz. the process of 'demand-aggregation'. Zald stresses the idea that the organisations political system acts as an institutionalised mechanism for reconciling disparate demands from competing sub-groups (cf. Easton, 1965; Pettigrew, 1973, 3.2.4 below)

"Through politics, individuals and groups attempt to change both individual and collective rewards. In this approach the distinctive feature of politics is that people who have grievances attempt to redress them not directly ... but through demands on authoritative officeholders". (Zald, 1970, p.242).

Political behaviour emerges from dissatisfaction with some organisational state among certain participants, whose demands are voiced, aggregated and impressed upon organisational authorities. The (re)actions of the latter with respect to the demands then either remove the causes of dissatisfaction, or manage (but not resolve) the conflicts by referring them to various institutionalised mechanisms such as committees, review procedures, appeal boards etc. For Zald, then, organisational politics are, at one and the same time, a process of demand-aggregation, a method of conflict resolution and a means for organisational adaptation.

The scope of organisational politics, however, is further restricted by the socially constraining operation of the 'constitution'.

"An organisation's constitution is its fundamental normative structure. The constitution of an organisation ... is a set of agreements and understandings which define the limits and goals of the group (collectivity) as well as the responsibilities and rights of participants standing in different relations to it". (Zald, 1970, p.225).

I mentioned above that Zald's view of organisational politics derives its strength from a notion of power which is not tied directly to organisational ends *per se*, and the benefit of this non-Parsonian definition is visible in the conflict conception of political behaviour. However, in the concept of an organisational constitution - a "historic and conceptually defined normative order" (Zald, 1970, p.226) - Zald appears to be presenting a basic and constant referent of organisational analysis, not far removed from Parsons' central value-system, from the managerialists' view of the formal structure, or, indeed, from Simon's ultimate 'value-premise'. The organisational constitution constrains and penetrates the internal political system, defining directly and indirectly the scope of organisational politics as concept and as reality.

It defines for example the formal distribution of decision-making influence, these authority-holders retaining a position somehow independent and transcendent of the process of organisational politics *qua* demand-generation. It is the job of these decision-makers to respond to expressed dissatisfaction from organised groups which 'lobby' them (cf. March's executive as a 'political broker', 1962, p.672. See Section 3.2.2 below). The constitution also defines the general structural form of authority relationships, and the latter in turn determines the probable form of organisational politics (Zald, 1970, pp.243-244). Institutional mechanisms for the handling of enduring conflicts are also constitutionally defined.

So far, I have been concerned solely with Zald's conception of organisational politics, and how he sees the latter process as being constrained by constitutional norms. As a theory of political behaviour in organisations, however, Zald examines two other significant influences viz. those emanating from the internal economy, and those deriving from environmental sources.

The economy of the organisation is its "productive-exchange system" :

"Economies are systems for producing and exchanging goods. Basic to any economy... are considerations of specialisation, role differentiation and division of labour". (Zald, 1970, p.249).

Division of labour, initially created for economic purposes, becomes the focus of social and political differentiation (cf. Goldner, 1970) and the power of subunits relates directly to the economic power (functional and budgetary) which they possess. A further political element is the issue of "organisational choice" which arises once the economic and technological aspects of production systems are perceived as flexible rather than as organisational givens. (cf. Child, 1972; 1973). The allocation of resources for incentive as well as productive or administrative purposes clearly has implications for the levels of dissatisfaction/satisfaction, for their perception as conflict issues and for their pursuit as demands. Zald lastly raises the important question of 'information systems', such as budgets and accounting systems, which concern the collection of data purporting to provide economic measures of how the organisation is or should be functioning, and comprise a set of rules concerning which data are relevant to such measures and how they should be organised.

"Like the sociologist of medicine who never questions the doctor's diagnosis, the sociologist of organisation has tended to accept accounting systems as given - as professionally and abstractly dictated". (Zald, 1970, p.253).

Although there have been important exceptions, Zald points to very important political questions deriving from apparently neutral information systems. That the latter place constraints of organisational decision-making activities is a conventional managerial wisdom, but that they are also used and manipulated to support demands on the system is an essentially political insight. (see 9.3).

The efficacy of this type of analysis clearly depends upon the meaningfulness of the distinction between 'economic' life and 'political' life but Zald's theory of organisational politics is equally dependent upon the analytical separation of the organisation from its environment. This latter distinction is intrinsic to the systems approach, and although this perspective assumes that organisation and environment are mutually-impinging, at least in the short run the environment is more or less a set of constraints. External political relations concern attempts to influence organisational goals, whilst the external economy of the organisation involves market relationships for selling its product or buying its factors of production. This aspect of Zald's framework is least developed, so that his analysis of the economic environment barely exists, while his view of the political environment is more or less an extension of the conception of 'internal polity' to include

"... the tangled web of external supporters, competitors, and enemies, and focusing on the alliances, commitments and structural mechanisms through which organisations relate to the power mode, of their environment". (Zald, 1970, pp.233-234).

Zald does not explain why he considers his approach based upon this analytical distinction to be any better than, for example, that of the Carnegie Institute, which broadens the definition of the organisation to include many of these 'external' interests (e.g. Simon, 1957, p.16; Cyert & March, 1959, p.78).

In this section so far, I have attempted to abstract a theory of (internal) organisational politics from Zald's political-economy approach. The political sub-system of the organisation is seen to be associated with the theoretical problems of decision-making and organisational change, the central processes of which are those of demand-aggregation, and, by association, of conflict resolution. These processes are circumscribed by the organis-

ational constitution defining the binding aspects of the normative order, by the internal economy and the politico-economic environment. As a theory of political life in organisations, Zald's approach encourages the study of power-conflict relations and processes, and the use of power for both sectional and collective ends.

(b) The major problem with Zald's conception of organisational politics is that, in a number of ways, it provides a severely limited view of its topic. This is partly connected with the systems tradition in which he writes and which he otherwise advances, and partly because the view reflects his dominant concern with the conflict aspects of organisational power.

Zald's notion of the political sub-system is defined in a number of ways at various stages of the paper in question, but four characteristics appear to be especially important in delineating the scope of the conception: first, the polity as a 'power system'; second, the polity as the formal decision-making system; third, the polity as a mechanism for stimulating change and resolving conflict; fourth, the political relevance of explicitly economic activities. Each characteristic of political behaviour has crucial repercussions for the effective conception of organisational power and politics encouraged by the political-economy approach.

Zald views the internal polity as synonymous with the 'operating power system' (Zald, 1970, p.229), which refers to the "patterned use of social influence". (ibid.) His broad definition of power to include both authoritative (i.e. constitutional) and "illegitimate" (i.e. unconstitutional) actions to pursue both sectional and collective goals takes the scope of the political system far beyond the boundaries set out by Parsons.

However, this first feature of the polity refers only to the dominant resource of the sub-system (i.e. power), and Zald further pins down the conception of politics to the problem of

organisational decision-making, i.e. the organised use of power (constitutional or not) to influence organisational decisions. (Zald, 1970, p.229, n.1). This restricts Zald's view of organisational politics to the context of formal decisions, and, indirectly, to the overt ("active") influence attempts. It is certain that the decision-making process is politicised, but it is unnecessary to restrict the political aspects of organisations to the visible use of power in a decisional context. Not only is the notion of politics relevant to other arenas of activity (e.g. the defensive or positive control of status or work, cf. Pettigrew's computer programmes, 1973; or Roy's machine-operations, 1969), but also politics is very much concerned with what Bachrach and Baratz (1963) call nondecision-making (see Chapter Four). This latter point relates also to the politics of organisational order, Zald's neglect of which I now turn to.

In addition to the power and decision-making characteristics of political behaviour, Zald develops the notion of politics as a social process in the context of organisational conflict and change. The initial point to be made is that he treats political behaviour as being both structural and processual, and in doing so appears to confuse the nature of politics. He develops a structural-functional analysis of power sources in a similar fashion to the approaches examined in 3.1, and from this analysis there emerges a picture of the organisation's political (i.e. power) structure. Having established this static image of the "political" structure, Zald seems content to treat it as an 'adequate' political theory of organisational order (Zald, 1970, p.242). Whereas the structural view of power and politics is tied to the problem of order, the "processual" conception is developed mainly with respect to organisational conflict and adaptation (Zald, 1970, pp.242-243). As will become clear below, this relationship of political process to conflict (sometimes almost as a matter of definition) haunts all the political conceptions reviewed in this chapter, and it is not sufficient, as Zald implies, to solve the problem of organisational order in a

structural analysis of political behaviour. In the latter view, order is artificially created by a static analysis, whereas a more adequate *theory* of organisational order would perceive this state as being politically (i.e. processually) accomplished. By defining the notion of politics as a social process, one avoids the age-old problem of the systems approach that associates a description or analysis of social (power) structure with a theory of social order.

As mentioned above, Zald's theory of political process is a political-conflict model of organisational adaptation or change. The central feature of politics is the process of demand-aggregation, in which people endeavour to redress grievances by voicing demands and, by collecting support, to lobby the formal authority-holders with an aim of influencing their decisions on the causes of dissatisfaction. The process of demand-aggregation, if successful, performs two important functions for the organisation: first, it encourages organisational change in a situation which is clearly out of equilibrium; second, and as a by-product, this political process functions to resolve or reduce conflicts.

As I have suggested above, to restrict the processual analysis of political behaviour to the more visible aspects of conflict and change is unnecessary in itself, but other weaknesses emerge from this particular *remedial* view of politics. With respect to the relationship between politics and conflict/change, it would have been possible to examine the process from the social actors' viewpoints (see 3.2.3 below), but Zald's systemic predilection leads him to focus upon politics from the organisation's perspective.<sup>10</sup> As a result, Zald's approach ensures that power becomes a utilised resource in the decision-making process (i.e. that the decision-making arena is 'politicised'); but at the same time the systemic orientation stresses politics as an abstract, adaptive mechanism for achieving change and resolving conflict (or, in terms closer to Zald's, alleviating dissatisfaction), to the virtual neglect of how power is used. It is an important step to acknowledge *that* power, in Zald's broad sense, is used, but if

the systems framework predisposes the researcher towards its functions rather than towards the (socio)logic of the process itself, much of what is 'political' about the use of power (i.e. the 'how's' and 'why's' of its usage) is omitted. The logical extreme of this position is to view politics as a passive reaction to 'dissatisfaction', rather than as the active and strategic pursuit of goals. In short, the treatment of the topic as a systemic mechanism effectively strips the organisational actors of their political role, which remains unexamined.

Some of the more important advantages of Zald's systemic view derive from its contribution to the understanding of the relationship between economic and political aspects of organisational life. It could be argued that the analytical distinction between the political and the economic is empirically misleading, because political activity is not so much a *type* of activity (as is economic behaviour) as a *quality* which may pertain to any activity, independent of type (cf. Burns, 1961, p.259). In this view, to tie the notion of politics to concrete decision-making behaviour is conceptually limiting. However, while Zald comes dangerously close to forgetting that the political/economic distinction is only analytical he never actually falls into the trap of unexplicated leaps between levels of theoretical abstraction.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Zald uses the polity/economy distinction to great effect in his analysis of how the most technical of 'economic' actions - e.g. the selection and use of accounting or budget information, or the choice of accounting rules or budgeting procedures - can become politicised. Such concrete examples demonstrate the inherent fuzziness of the analytical distinction, and may be seen as illustrating the appropriateness of the 'quality' definition of politics over the 'type' definition; but their chief contribution is to indicate the relevance and necessity of questioning the most "innocuous" and "neutral" of organisational actions, when the topic is organisational politics.

Unfortunately Zald does not heed this recommendation derived from his very important insights into the political implications of

economic activities. The economy may be politicised, but other central aspects of the organisation *qua* 'political-economy' are not. Nowhere is this weakness more significant than in his analysis of the organisational constitution, which plays such a central role in Zald's approach. The failure to treat the constitution as politically relevant reintroduces the old Parsonian problem of consensus that the political-conflict model appears, on the surface, to resolve. The fundamental normative order of the organisation is defined by its constitution, which is explicitly or implicitly agreed upon by the participants whose activities it constrains. However, the constitution *is* political in the sense that it incorporates a "mobilisation of bias" (see 4.1) lending political leverage in one direction rather than another. As with any organisational factor, the constitution may become politicised either because it can be used intentionally by one social actor to further his interests, or, relatedly, because it can itself become the focus of political support or dispute.<sup>12</sup> It is theoretically absurd, not to say naive, to suppose that the constitution is somehow "above" such actions, while information systems are not.

It is especially important to understand the constitution in this way, because it plays such an important theoretical role in Zald's framework, defining rules, procedures and obligations in all arenas of organisational life. If the constitution is consensually-established and neutral in its operation, so too are all the institutionalised activities and factors. Organisational decision-makers respond "authoritatively" to aggregated demands, according to the nature of the political (i.e. formal authority) structure;<sup>13</sup> institutional mechanisms such as procedures and committees impartially handle enduring conflicts (Zald, 1970, p.245); the problem of managerial succession resolves itself according to institutionalised selection procedures and constitutionally-valid career patterns of candidates<sup>14</sup> (Zald, 1970, p.245 ff.); etc. These organisational matters, amongst the more politically sensitive of issues, are all treated by Zald in a non-political fashion, because, one suspects, of his consensual, a-political notion of a constitution which renders organisational order/equilibrium unproblematic.

In summary, Zald's political-conflict model of the organisation highlights the political aspects of economic behaviour, but fails to extend the same logic to other organisational factors and activities. This theoretical blindness is induced by his special emphasis on the relationship between the political and economic aspects of the organisation, and the corresponding relative de-emphasis on other spheres; and by his unnecessary consensual view of the organisation (and its constitution) which renders many highly pertinent factors and activities politically uninteresting.

### 3.2.2 The Organisation as a Political Coalition

(a) In much the same way as the political-economy approach emerges from systems theorising, the conceptualisation of the organisation as a 'political coalition' is grounded in the decision-making approach that was explored in 2.1. Having examined Simon's approach to organisational decision-making, it was demonstrated that the topic was treated in a rationalistic and psychological manner, this in turn reinforcing the tradition of administrative formalism of which Simon himself was so critical. To the extent that he touched upon the political aspects of his topic, they were treated as a residual category of dubious morality and of insignificant theoretical utility.

Cyert and March's view of organisational decision-making owes much to their mentor, Simon. However, they have developed an explicitly political conception of the organisation that has subsequently permeated the literature on decision-making as an established fact. The works of Harvey and Mills (1970) and Pettigrew (1973) owe much to Cyert and March, and each, in their own ways, contribute further to the political aspects of decision-making in organisations.

In this section, I shall concentrate on investigating the contribution of Cyert and March's 'political coalition' view to the increasing "spirit of political realism" (Loasby, 1968, p.355) in the decision-making field of research. In 3.2.4 below, I shall assess Pettigrew's study of this same organisational topic - the reasons for this separation will become apparent later.

Cyert and March (1959, 1963; also March, 1962) inherit their major theoretical goals and assumptions from Simon's framework, but they elaborate an approach of greater complexity and refinement. With the development of computer simulation techniques, they argue that the major defence of the naive profit-maximising entrepreneurial model of economic decisions - its analytical simplicity - is no longer tenable. They claim to be on the threshold of a more realistic model, the necessary complexity of which is well within the grasp of computer models. After Simon, they accept decision-making as the central process of economic organisations, and the understanding of how the process *actually* works is their major goal. The political aspects of their view of organisations emerges from their major premise that the business firm should be seen as the basic unit of analysis :

"Organisations make decisions. They make decisions in the same sense in which individuals make decisions..." (Cyert and March, 1959, p.76).

It is in their attempt to make theoretical sense of this assumption - for they are only too aware of the problem of reification - that the issue of political behaviour arises.

The issue arises specifically in their consideration of the concept of organisational goals, because if organisations are to make decisions like individuals they must have objectives. For both Simon and the conventional micro-economist, the notion of 'organisational goal' is theoretically both significant *and* unproblematic. However, Cyert and March correctly observe that if the concept of organisational goal is to be theoretically realistic and meaningful (as opposed to assumed) they must construct a theory of organisational objectives which relates goal-formation to the behaviour of groups and individuals in the organisation. Once these goals are socially created and 'objectified'<sup>15</sup> they may be seen to be *organisational* in that they become independent of their creators.

It is this process of 'goal-formation' which Cyert and March see as explicitly political. Jointly, they write :

"Let us conceive the organisation as a coalition. It is a coalition of individuals, some of them organised into sub-coalitions". (Cyert and March, 1959, p.78).

More overtly, March claims that :

"... a business firm is a political coalition and... the executive in the firm is a political broker". (March, 1962, p.672).

An organisation comprises individuals and groups who have different interests in it, who make different demands on it and whose participation differs in terms of intensity or activity (Cyert and March, 1959, p.81). Those actors most intensely involved will endeavour to realise their interests, and, in doing so, they will form coalitions with each other. Objectives are created as coalition members bargain with each other in attempts to sort out differences and reach consensus or compromise.

"It is primarily through bargaining within this active group that what we call organisational objectives arise". (Cyert and March, 1959, p.81).

During the process of bargaining, the active members of the coalition offer and exchange "side-payments" in order to persuade each other to shift ground in one direction or another. Side-payments may be in a material form, but, with respect to the problem of goal-formation, the most important side-payments take the form of *policy-commitments*. In return for support on a present issue, members offer future support on issues of greater relevance to their political colleagues. This mutual exchange and accommodation process leads to the formation of broadly defined, consensual policies (cf. Abell, 1975<sup>16</sup>).

As mentioned so far, this 'political' process of coalition formation is simultaneously a process of bargaining and of goal-formation. It is also a process of conflict-resolution - a theme

which March develops in his paper on the business firm as a political coalition (March, 1962). Business organisations abide by the basic postulates of a conflict-system, and an empirically valid theory of conflict-resolution requires a "process-oriented political" approach (March, 1962, p.671). The 'political coalition' approach to conflict-resolution in organisations emerges from the fact that organisations have to process and reconcile diverse demands from different participants, these demands being mutually inconsistent and organisationally unrealisable in full (cf. Abell's "initial preference outcomes", 1975, p.16). This approach acquires its theoretical legitimacy by reference to the dominant theories in political science - indeed, one suspects that it is this association that persuades March to re-label the 'organisational coalition' of his work with Cyert, a 'political coalition'. In essence, the conception of the political coalition of the business firm, and its attendant theory, shows marked similarities to the "interest group theory of political decision-making" (reference to Truman's approach, 1958): the system with its "active" politicians pursuing representative interests, with its peripheral citizens setting loose constraints on policy-formation, with bargaining between relative equals (under the guidance of the executive) within the institutionalised rules of the game. (Cyert and March, 1963, p.32ff.; March, 1962, pp.673-5).

To summarise, the model of the organisation created by Cyert and March is that of a 'political-conflict system' (March, 1962, p.677). The assumption that the organisation is a conflict system, which, for more general reasons needs to possess a goal, leads to the development of 'political' concepts about coalition behaviour. Within objective limitations (Cyert and March, 1963, p.39; also see Abell, 1975, p.114ff.), the organisational coalition emerges from a bargaining process during which commitments are made concerning present and future broadly-defined objectives.

(b) The general consensus amongst critics has been favourable, attributing to Cyert and March's theory of coalition-

formation and its associated concepts an air of greater political realism. A fuller examination of their approach as a *theory of organisational power and politics* reveals that this is a surface realism residing more in the terminology employed, than in the deeper semantics of that terminology. As a theory of organisational politics, Cyert and March's approach has four general weaknesses. First the central notion of the organisational (political) coalition is largely undeveloped, and ambiguously conceptualised. Its political quality is further limited by a second problem, viz. the rationalism of the framework and of the mode of explanation employed. Third because of their lack of commitment to the study of the political process as a topic in itself, their approach ultimately dissolves into a type of organisational formalism which is a weakness they themselves seek to criticise in others, and which simultaneously deprives their approach of any theoretical depth in the area of organisational politics (cf. Burns, 1969, p.236ff.). Finally, it can be argued that these authors fail to avoid the problem of reification by strategically conceiving the organisation as a political coalition, and, in insisting on the organisation as the necessary unit of analysis, they present a paradoxical view of decision-making.

I shall consider, first, the meaning of the concept of organisational coalition, showing that it is conceptually both ambiguous and lacking depth. As indicated earlier, for Cyert and March the organisation is a coalition of individuals and sub-coalitions, but as their ideas develop it becomes clear that not all organisational participants are 'coalition members' in the strict sense of influencing goals. Two major constraints reduce the membership of the effective coalition and range of possible coalitions.

First, participants differ in the interests they hold in the organisation, in the demands they make on it, and, importantly, in the intensity of their participation in the organisational coalition. Cyert and March thus distinguish between 'internal' and 'external' members of *the* coalition according to the degree

of passivity they exhibit. It is the small number of active 'internal' members who determine organisational goals, and the majority of coalition "members" remain of the periphery because

"... the payment demands they make are of such a character that they can be met rather easily"  
(Cyert and March, 1963, p.30).

Were their demands not easily met, these members, motivated by their dissatisfaction, would presumably be free to make demands on the organisational executive (March's 'political brokers') through coalition behaviour.

The political coalition is also limited by objective factors. Cyert and March assert that the organisation's environment imposes certain constraints on the possible "classes of combinations of members" that are "viable" (1963, p.39). Only those coalitions satisfying externally-imposed criteria may perform the goal-setting function. Cyert and March's own arguments, then, suggest that their definition of the organisation as a coalition is highly misleading, since the effective - one might say "dominant" - coalition consists of a minority of the actual organisational membership, and is only one out of a set of "viable coalitions", the latter being one class of possible coalitions.

While it is misleading to refer to this "dominant" coalition as the organisational coalition, this equation serves to direct theoretical attention from issues of central importance to a conflict theory of coalition politics. The broad view of an 'organisational coalition' leads Cyert and March to a complete neglect of the membership of the dominant coalition. This neglect derives from a failure to relate explicitly coalitional membership to the structure of the organisation, and results in an almost randomised view of organisational politics (cf. Pettigrew, 1973, p.22). Since Cyert and March do not locate political behaviour in power relationships (a point to be taken up below), the image of coalition politics is a purely voluntaristic one, organisational

participants being freely able to engage in coalitional behaviour and bargaining. Subject only to the environmental constraints mentioned above,<sup>17</sup> the main factor determining whether a participant will become an active member of the dominant coalition appears to be the amount of dissatisfaction he feels with organisational "payments" - this is a return to the inducements - contributions theory of Simon and Barnard. This apparent organisational freedom is reminiscent of the pluralistic-cum-interest group theories to which March (1962, p.671) pays tribute, but totally neglects the fact that access to organisational politics is differentially distributed.

Cyert and March's theory omits the explicit examination of *who* constitutes the political coalition, and provides a naively voluntaristic view of how participants become coalitional members. But accepting the existence of a dominant coalition, two further questions present themselves for consideration, and both of them are neglected. Cyert and March do not attempt to explain how coalitions work, or how they operate internally. Such internal dynamics are central aspects of the politics of coalitional behaviour, and to reduce them to rational exchanges of side-payments in a bargaining process (see also below) is to do a grave injustice to the complexities of organisational life.

What happens to non-coalition members and to members of unsuccessful coalitions? Cyert and March's conception rules that the former are passive, and by inference satisfied since they would otherwise be active in coalitional behaviour.<sup>18</sup> However, it would seem to be a rather crass assumption that non-coalition members are therefore content, or that their passivity is self-imposed, or indeed that they do not exhibit political behaviour other than at the level of organisational goal-setting. This latter point, of course, simply reflects the narrowness of this view of organisational politics. The case of the members of unsuccessful coalitions is more interesting, as it appears to be another reflection of the conceptual ambiguity referred to above. Since the 'political coalition' emerges as dominant from amongst an unspecified number of other

coalitions ("viable" or not), it is clear even within Cyert and March's rationalistic conception of the bargaining process, that some organisational participants will be "losers". These losers are especially significant because they were "politically" involved and hence dissatisfied in some general sense. In Cyert and March's account, these losers somehow withdraw from the political scene, either agreeing with matters decided by the dominant coalition - presumably the "rational" thing to do - or anyway accepting them. However, one might suspect from everyday organisational experiences that rapid conversion or detached forbearance are hardly the characteristics normally associated with political defeat.

So far I have shown how Cyert and March's conception of the organisational coalition conceals some of the most important political issues requiring theoretical attention. In explaining the weakness of this political conception, I have referred in passing to the rationalism of Cyert and March's approach. In Chapter Two, I criticised Simon's decision-making approach as rationalistic, claiming that a political view of his topic might correct this bias. The explicitly political concerns of Cyert and March, writing within Simon's own tradition, have been seen by many theorists as indicating a movement away from the rationality model of decision-making. However, for Cyert and March, organisational politics is a pre-eminently *rational* process.

The rationality of the approach arises for a number of reasons. As with Simon, Cyert and March see the organisation as a (boundedly) rational instrument for achievement collective goals, and the computer-simulation methodology further constrains their analysis of organisational matters. Within this theoretical and methodological context of rationalism, the conception of coalitional behaviour serves an expressly theoretical function, viz. to persuade the reader that the notion of organisational goal does not constitute a reification. To this extent, it might be argued that Cyert and March resort to the study of organisational politics more as a 'rational' technique than as an area of theoretical interest.

Given these broader considerations it is possibly not surprising that organisational politics are themselves analysed as a quasi-rational process. In spite of the political realism attributed to the conception of the organisational coalition, in their joint works there is no discussion of 'politics' at all; even in March's paper (1962), where the 'political' label is attached to the coalition, there is only one passing reference to the concept of 'power'. Such an omission must make anybody who wishes to develop a theory of organisational politics deeply suspicious of the meaning and depth of the framework (cf. Pettigrew, 1973, p.22).

The political dimension of Cyert and March's model involves a bargaining process in which general objectives are framed and agreed upon, however bargaining is not conceived as a strategic power phenomenon, but as a rational process<sup>18</sup> whereby individuals make side-payments to each other in terms of monetary rewards and policy-commitments. Members are seen in terms of their potential "value" to different combinations of members, the aim of coalescing being to achieve the necessary "total value" to hold effective sway. Side-payments made to individuals hence reflect the "marginal value" (March, 1962, p.673) of them to a potential coalition. The notion of "value" in this argument reflects a suitable language of the computer methodology advocated by Cyert and March, as well as helping to bridge the gap between political science and economics. One might also suppose that it is used as some equivalent to 'power', but the notion of 'value' effectively abstracts from the political dimension of coalitions by implying that coalitions form and bargaining proceeds according to rational criteria observable and measurable, i.e. having a clear value.

The apparent (i.e. superficial) neatness and precision of the verbage should not be allowed to conceal the difficulties and ambiguities of the topic of organisational politics. Cyert and March argue that knowledge of the demands and values of coalition members, of the relative costs and returns of different coalitions, and of the supply of side-payments (given the environmental constraints), renders the bargaining (i.e. political) process

comprehensible. At one level, such a proposition may be truistic. However, at deeper level, it solves by fiat the very questions which a sociological view of organisational politics seeks to ask. Cyert and March, for example, do not ask how participants acquire 'value' or 'marginal value', or indeed how they use their 'value' or knowledge of 'values' in the political process. Their rationalism<sup>20</sup> thus prevents the examination of basic political questions concerning the coalitional process. To give participants 'values' as a heuristic device for predicting agreements is a valid task, but in depriving participants of 'power' to pursue (or being prevented from pursuing) their aims Cyert and March surely deny themselves access to the political reality they so earnestly seek.

It has been noted above that the coalition concept appears to be a theoretical strategy for avoiding the allegation of reification, and there are a number of indications in Cyert and March's treatment of the concept that supports this rather cynical view. As with Zald's approach (see 3.2.1) organisational politics emerges from Cyert and March's view as a mechanism for setting goals and resolving conflict, and their interests in the topic beyond this are severely restricted. The agreements arrived at through coalition behaviour become the fodder for a number of formal structural devices, constructed for the elaboration of objectives, and through such devices (e.g. the budget; the organisation chart)

"... the coalition agreements of today are institutionalised into semi-permanent arrangements". (Cyert and March, 1963, p.34).

Earlier it was noted that Cyert and March have no theory of coalition membership or coalition activity, so the agreements, which are produced by a rational process of bargaining and which become uncontroversial and uncontested once created, undergo an equally uncontroversial and uncontested institutionalisation process. Being formal, and "largely self-confirming" (ibid.) these devices are unpoliticised in their operation even though they perform the essential allocational tasks of the organisation. Almost

magically, without reference to any real political process, this approach creates a stable, consensual set of formal objectives to guide the organisation in its decision-making activity.

Cyert and March go further by suggesting that certain "operational" goals are effectively outside the influence of "many parts"<sup>21</sup> (Cyert and March, 1963, p.40) of the political coalition. They list five such goals, including a profit goal, which they had earlier suggested possessed no logical priority over the goals of lower participants. These five goals bear a startling resemblance to those kinds of goals which micro-economists had previously chosen as superordinate goals (cf. March, 1962, p.666ff.). It would appear that, after all the theorising and conceptual fuss made about coalitions, Cyert and March resort to an image of organisational goals imposed by themselves, *not* created by coalitional behaviour. Furthermore, in the models of organisational decision-making which they present in the later part of their book, they

"... restrict attention to this list of goals..."

(Cyert and March, 1963, p.43).

I have shown that their approach about organisational politics in coalitions is weak, but can these arguments be forgotten quite so easily? In the face of this reassertion of organisational goals, and of the neutrality of stabilising devices, Cyert and March re-introduce a formalism which detracts from the search for realism they advocate and which, as Burns (1969, p.235 ff.) argues, jeopardises any chance of developing a sense of politics within their rationality model.

In spite of Cyert and March's persistent attempts to justify the treatment of organisations as decision-makers by resort, as we have seen, to a coalitional viewpoint on goal-formation, it can be argued that Cyert and March do not avoid the reification problem. This is partly on theoretical grounds - all the arguments above suggest that the theory of coalition behaviour is itself based on unrealistic assumptions, and crude propositions - and partly because the problem of decision-making organisations simply contravenes our

knowledge of how the world works. As Loasby bluntly asserts, in parody of Cyert and March (see quote p.122 above) :

"Organisations do not make decisions.  
Decisions are made by people".  
(Loasby, 1968, p.352).

A few paragraphs ago, I showed that in the end Cyert and March select the organisational goals which they examine independently of the political coalition - such an imposition is typical of the micro-economists they criticise as being unrealistic. Cyert and March (following Simon) also eloquently dismiss the micro-economists' omniscient decision-making entrepreneur as unrealistic, but their alternative is not distantly related. Instead of assuming that the decision maker is an actual, though non-existent, person, they assume that role to be played by a "fictitious person" - the organisation itself. And this assumption is at the very heart of the problem of reification. For heuristic purposes, of course, it is permissible (although I personally believe it theoretically undesirable) to make such an assumption, but Cyert and March simply do not provide an adequate and acceptable theory of micro-processes to justify the reified view of the organisation to be held simultaneously with their expressed desire for descriptive realism.

Cyert and March's total enterprise becomes the more absurd because they posit two theories of organisational decision-making. Their main purpose is to explain decision-making as the predictable consequence of four sub-theories concerning the actions and goals of organisations (Cyert and March, 1963, p.21), but they also outline the theory of the political coalition to rationalise how goals arise from micro processes. However, there is a real sense in which the goals produced within the bargaining process *are* decisions, and it is a simple logical extension of this almost peripheral theory of coalitional behaviour to suggest that all decision-making occurs in this way. Such an approach shortcircuits the need for a reified view of organisational decision-making, is theoretically neater, conceptually more parsimonious and does not run counter to common-sense.

### 3.2.3 Political Action in Organisations

(a) The theoretical and empirical works of Dalton (1959) and of Burns (1955, 1961, 1969, 1977, and with Stalker 1961) were conducted apparently independently of each other (there being no cross-references), with different theoretical purposes, and with different conceptual apparatus; and yet they reveal major similarities and continuities with respect to the problem of organisational politics. Their common theme, which makes it possible to consider them together, is that they insist that political process be analysed from the participants' own viewpoints.<sup>22</sup> In part this theoretical injunction emerges from the inescapable demands of a chosen research method and the data which the latter unearths, but, as will become clear, the similarities in perspective provide a relatively coherent view of organisational politics, with a very different slant to those already examined.

In this section, I shall first set the theoretical scenes in which these two sociologists developed their contributions, then abstract the thematic similarities present in the two approaches with respect to a theory of political behaviour in organisations, and finally review the conception of organisational power and politics that their approaches encourage.

Dalton's contributions have been mainly empirical, culminating in the publication of his important report (1959) on managerial behaviour in industrial organisations. Based upon an intensive study over a period of ten years, much of which was spent as a participant observer, the major research purpose was firmly rooted in the sociological and organisational environment of the late 1940's and 1950's viz. to clarify the theoretical significance of the informal/formal distinction that had dominated research since the Hawthorne Studies first challenged classical management theory. Dalton does not refer to the actions of his managers as 'political', but his interviewees and informants do apply the vocabulary of politics to describe (and to evaluate) many types of unofficial behaviour. It might be said, therefore, that Dalton's view of

organisational politics emanates from an insistent informalism, which may well be a source of acute irritation to present-day readers but arguably constitutes an essential step in the study of the topic.<sup>23</sup> (cf. Burns, 1969, p.235).

Burn's contribution to the theory of organisational politics also finds its main source in his research (with Stalker, 1961) of managerial behaviour in the electronics industry. This report of the management of innovation is often cited in the literature, but almost always with respect to the distinction between mechanistic and organic systems of management and the 'suitability' of these systems to different states of environmental condition. The second half of this report, and a number of papers that precede and follow it (1955, 1961 and 1969), which are explicitly concerned with political aspects of the industrial organisation, remain relatively unexamined. For Burns, organisational politics - a form of concrete social action - constitute an unavoidable reference point in the understanding of how the environment influences the management of industrial enterprises.

The theory of organisational politics which can be abstracted from Burns' and Dalton's work hinges upon four important, shared characteristics. First, organisational politics are characterised as a type of social action, in the Weberian sense - it is the implications of this feature that most sharply distinguish this approach from those political approaches above. Second, this approach represents political behaviour as a conflict phenomenon. The third distinctive emphasis on the processual aspects of the topic is, with the second point, held in common with the other theories above. Last, both Burns and Dalton see political activities as being associated with informally established groupings.

Tom Burns provides the most explicit theoretical statement on political action, arguing that organisational change - his particular interest - cannot be explained as an inevitable "objective" reaction to structural/environmental factors. To make

such an assumption is to overlook entirely the problems surrounding the accomplishment of that change by social actors *within* the organisational process.

"Political action is a necessary instrument for the accomplishment of internal change ... which to the outsider is the inevitable consequence of a new situation". (Burns, 1961, p.266).

In short, change does not simply "happen", but is promoted and resisted within a political process. This view rejects the neutral, passive conception of Cyert and March, and the 'type' definition of politics proffered by the systems approach. Politics refer to 'partial' behaviour, and to the quality or "colour" (Burns, 1961, p.259) of those behaviours rather than to any specific activity. Political behaviour is a "mode of doing" (ibid.) and therefore always reflects the results of human effort fired by emotional attachments and interpretations (Burns and Stalker, 1961, p.143). It is the fact that rationalist and structuralist approaches abstract from these central features of 'effort' and 'doing' that makes them singularly inappropriate to the study of politics.

Although Dalton does not attend to the notion of politics from a conceptual or definitional viewpoint, and his purposes are distant from Burns', there exist close similarities through his concern with understanding

"... the gap between official and unofficial ways of doing things, and ... the emotional splits and name-calling among associates devoted to one general approach or the other". (Dalton, 1959, p.3).

Many of these unofficial "ways of doing things" are recognised as 'politics' by the participants themselves<sup>24</sup>, apparently on the grounds that they involve the use of personal relationships and organisational resources to pursue partial ends. Burns (1961, p.263ff.) conceptual discussion of how political action requires the use of human resources for promoting interests appears to place

Dalton's empirical observations within a neater theoretical framework. With less explicit conceptual clarity, Dalton directs the reader to the phenomenon of organisational politics by allowing his informants and interviewees to demonstrate their own insightful awareness of it.

I have shown above how the systems and decision-making approaches develop a 'political-conflict' model of the organisation. The 'action' approach displays a similar view of the topic. Dalton perceives the organisation as :

"... an existing system of conflict. That is, in the relations among various departments, ranks, official bodies, etc., there were already ongoing collisions between purpose and surroundings that interfered with direct approaches to goals."  
(Dalton, 1959, p.51).

Within this continuing set of conflict relationships, which emerged inevitably from an organisational process relying upon the co-existence and co-operation of specialised subgroups with different subgroups, were introduced new issues and problems that nourished and sustained the existing patterns of opposition. At the heart of the political process is the persistent interlocking of actions and counteractions (Dalton, 1959, p.218ff.) as all parties in the organisation seek to

"... loosen controls on themselves and tighten them on others". (Dalton, 1959, p.19; see also Roy, 1969).

In the short run anyway, a successful loosening or tightening of such controls means a parallel loss of control or discretion for other groupings, and such actions are supported or resisted in a veritable 'power struggle'.

Burns' analysis follows a similar path, albeit in his own characteristically more theoretical manner :

"... members of a corporation are at one and the same time co-operators in a common enterprise and rivals for the material and intangible rewards of successful competition with each other" (Burns, 1961, p.261).

The organisation in action is conceived as an "interpretive process" (Burns and Stalker, 1961, p.77ff. and pp.155-6) through which the diversity of languages and meanings of the constituent specialist subgroups are expressed. These different professional perspectives (cf. Bucher, 1970, p.13ff) are germane to the understanding of political-conflict relations between subgroups, either through such 'cultural differences' being a cause or source of conflict and rivalry, or because they reflect conflict relations, reinforcing them in the manner of an ideology.<sup>25</sup>

"The political system of a business concern is the product of the various demands, either actually or potentially conflicting, which are made on the total resources of the concern." (Burns and Stalker, 1961, p.144).

Between Burns and Dalton, there exists a fundamental agreement that politics are conflict phenomena actively created by different subgroups in the organisation.

Burns provides the most sophisticated theoretical rationale for conceptualising politics in processual terms. In his dismissal of the structuralist approach to political behaviour, he makes the case very succinctly :

"... structural models of institutions and modes of political activity are abstractions from the activities which they are intended to explain and

guide ... They are representations of static forms, not of processes". (Burns, 1961, p.259).

The understanding of political behaviour, as defined both by Burns and (implicitly) by Dalton, requires the empirical examination of the sequences in which they occur and the 'internal' reasons why they follow the sequences observed. To do otherwise - to paraphrase the above statement - is to neglect the very meaning of the activities underview *as* politics i.e. to overlook the important details of effort, emotion, and purpose. In a proposition of equal importance, Dalton states the following :

"Organisation is not seen as a chiselled entity, but as a shifting set of contained and ongoing counter phases of action". (Dalton, 1959, p.4; also p.218 ff.).

Bucher (1970) comes to the same conclusion by reversing the argument - instead of starting from the problem of politics and arguing that this topic is essentially processual, she begins with the processual problem of "how this organisation runs" and recommends that

"... in order to describe and understand the flow of events in the organisation, it is necessary to use political concepts". (Bucher, 1970, p.25).

Either way, in this approach politics and process are inextricably intertwined as concept and reality.

The relation between politics and conflict/process is relatively uncontentious - both the systems and the decision-making traditions encourage such a view, although for different reasons. However, the 'political action' framework proposes a range of concepts that aim to unravel the sociological mystery unsolved by the alternative approaches viz. how do organisational participants accomplish what is recognisably (to themselves and to the interpretive theorist) *politics*? At one level the solution offered by Burns and Dalton consists of a set of propositions about the activities of political groups.

It is true that individuals may act alone in the political arena, but the individual

"... may be, and often is, able to increase his personal power by attaching himself to parties or sections of people who represent the same kind of resource and wish to enhance its exchange value, or to cabals who seek to control or influence the exercise of patronage in the organisation. Such formations have to do with what are commonly, and rightly, regarded as the 'internal politics' of organisations" (Burns, 1969, pp.233-234).

Politics concern the actions of distinct groupings (cf. Dalton, 1959, p.57), and in another, earlier paper<sup>26</sup>, Burns (1955) distinguishes between two basic types of group - the 'clique' and the 'cabal'. He sees the clique as a grouping established to provide defensive support and reassurance for members who perceive that their domain of control and their status are being threatened (Burns, 1955, p.472ff.), while, conversely, the cabal is an active, power-seeking group (Burns, 1955, p.480).

In a similar manner, Dalton provides the concept of a clique<sup>27</sup> to denote "... a small exclusive group of persons with a common interest..." (Dalton, 1959, p.52). He develops a typology of cliques as "horizontal" and "vertical" (a dimension not examined by Burns), and, more importantly, as "defensive" and "aggressive" (Dalton, 1959, pp.61-63). The defensive and aggressive cliques of Dalton *more or less* correspond respectively to Burns' cliques and cabals, and neither political grouping is likely to be particularly permanent. (Burns, 1955, p.479 and p.481; Dalton, 1959, p.61).

Probably the most important feature of political action within cliques and cabals is that, unlike the previous approaches examined above, it is *not* tied to the goals of the organisation nor

conducted legitimately *within* the organisational constitution. Cliques and cabals are not 'interest-groups' in the sense defined by March (1962; cf. Burns, 1955, p.473). From his many examples of clique behaviour, it is quite clear that for Dalton cliques are informal, unofficial groups *par excellence*, their activities being of a "morally questionable" (from the participants' viewpoint) type. Burns shares this view :

"It is the peculiarity of the clique and of the cabal that membership is not legitimate, or not quite legitimate; that their existence and participation in them are, to however a mild degree, infractions of the rules and of the order prevailing in a particular milieu". (Burns, 1955, pp.473-474).

To summarise, I have argued that Burns and Dalton, from different starting points, develop a political framework around such similar central concepts and propositions that they may be treated, in general terms, as one approach. This approach attends to the internal dynamics of political-conflict processes, the focal points of which are non-legitimate political groupings.

(b) In the context of this thesis, of the definition of its scope and its assumptions, the work of Burns and Dalton must be welcomed as an advance on the other political approaches above. Neither Dalton nor Burns have received the acclaim worthy of their theoretical contribution to the topic of organisational politics, although theorists draw heavily upon *Men Who Manage* for examples of the use of power. Dalton's work has been received as a "real landmark" (Crozier, 1964, p.106) and as providing a "powerful insight" (Mouzelis, 1975, p.159), but has been only lightly treated as a *theory* of organisational *politics*. Burns' papers have been consulted by British sociologists with interests in this area of study, but their aim has generally not been to evaluate his theoretical contribution. In order to amend this failure to build upon what I have called the 'action' approach, I shall briefly comment upon the more specific issues arising from Burns' and Dalton's

research - I shall return to more general matters in 3.3 below, and extend the important arguments in Chapter Six, in preparation for Part Three.

It would appear to me that the theoretical significance of the Burns-Dalton framework to the study of the political process stems from one dominant feature viz. its "insistent informalism". More broadly, this demand that we look at the actual practices used by participants, and thus be wary of accepting the formal chart and its mechanisms as "how things work", may be seen as both a theoretical and a methodological injunction which, when followed, reveals for consideration a range of actions 'internally' defined and accepted as 'political'. The post-Dalton demise of the informal/formal distinction (cf. Mouzelis, 1977, p.147ff) has generally been advantageous to the development of the sociology of organisations, but, as Burns points out, this progression can only be theoretically progressive if, as a result, we resist any attempt

"... to re-establish the conception of organisations as monolithic, or at least homogeneous, structures".  
(Burns, 1969, p.235).

I have argued above, with different but as important points as those raised by Burns, that the systems and decision-making approaches have tended by inference to re-establish such a conception, and that it was partly this formalism and rationalism that deprives them of a deeper political realism.

The spirit of informalism, updated by Burns (1969) in his analytical division of the three systems<sup>28</sup> of the business enterprise, has had at least two important consequences as far as a theory of organisational politics is concerned: first it detaches, as a matter of definition, the notion of political behaviour from organisational goals and the formal or working organisation; second, it focuses attention on politics as a concrete process of social actions held together by an internal logic. It is such consequences that allow political action to be seen as a form of

social energy that, in its expression, plays such an important organisational role i.e. it is a way of getting things done. However, while both these consequences provide for the substantial advantages of this framework over the others so far delineated, at the same time it is necessary to examine them critically in order to establish the direction in which they point, and the weak points which need attention.

Regarding the repercussions of the first consequence of this approach, the detachment of the 'political' from the 'formal' aspects of organisation, explicit in both Dalton's and Burns' work, may serve as a necessary device to release for theoretical scrutiny the topic of organisational power and politics. However, much care is needed in order to avoid oversimplifying the political dimension. By conceiving of politics in informal, quasi-illegitimate terms, and in distinguishing political action from the formal or working organisation there is a real danger of misunderstanding, or under-emphasising the interplay between the political and the formal. While acknowledging that a sociological view of politics is only possible by untying political behaviour from organisational goals and organisational decision-making as a formal activity, it must be carefully made clear that these formal arenas are politicised, or at least 'politicisable'. Dalton's official/unofficial distinction, and Burns' 'tri-systemic' conception (Burns, 1969) can lead to a compartmentalised view of politics, especially if the organisation is seen to possess a distinctly 'political system'. But if politics is a 'colour' with which activities are imbued, this must include formal activities as well. If we accept that formal activities can be 'political' in hue, the neat distinctions between formal and informal, legitimate and non-legitimate may serve to confuse rather than to clarify the tasks of theorising and empirical research.

The danger of analysing political action out of the context of the formal or working organisation raises a much broader theoretical issue introduced in Chapter One, viz. the structuralist criticism of interpretive sociology that the latter, in ignoring

the external 'objective' constraints on organisational participants, tend to give a free-floating view of organisation life which is plainly unrealistic. A study of organisational power and politics which de-emphasises the formal-structural aspects of the organisation at the same time overemphasises what it is possible for participants to achieve. Crozier (1964) certainly believes that Dalton has committed such an error :

"Dalton ... is so haunted by the fear of being misled by the formal structure and the formal definitions of the roles that ... he reports only irregularities, backdoor deals, and subtle blackmail ... He forgets the rational side of the organisation and the series of social controls that prevent people from taking too much advantage of their own strategic situation" (Crozier, 1964, p.106).

Crozier thus criticises the political action view precisely for its conceptual liberation from the formal/rational constraints of goals, rules and structure. Mouzelis (1975, pp.158-159), by implication of his general thesis, similarly decries the apparent freedom of political activities from broader structural considerations. Both critics point to a real theoretical problem - viz. that political actions cannot be divorced from the rules, 'goals', and other contextual constraints of the formal organisation - but they appear determined to re-establish 'constraint' by theoretical definition (structuralist, rationalist or formalist), which solution cannot take the study of political process beyond the models outlined earlier.

Such a criticism may have some credibility in Dalton's case, but in various articles and books, Burns demonstrates the immense potential of the political action view when politics are seen as a social force in a structural and historical context. For example, Burns and Stalker (1961) analyse the articulation of political actions and interactions with the technical and market forces which circumscribe managerial life in electronics firms (see also the

recent examination of the B.B.C., Burns, 1977).

In general, the political action approach may provide a certain *image* of an unconstrained political process in organisations, but this image is not a necessary characteristic of its conceptual framework. Such an image arises because both Burns and Crozier identify and investigate politics *as conflict*. If political action occurs solely in the context of organisational conflict, illustrations of politics so-conceived will tend to stress their 'overt change' or 'open resistance' aspects. There is also the tendency to report political behaviour which successfully 'changed' or 'resisted', thus underlining the apparent freedom of political action from the constraints of the organisation's formal and social structure. What is needed, to combat this image, is an interpretive sociological analysis which gives constraint and structure a clear theoretical role, but one which is compatible with the postulate of voluntarism. Instead of retreating from a 'political action' approach, as is implied by Crozier (1964) and Mouzelis (1975), such an approach needs extending and strengthening to incorporate an explicit image of the *impossibilities* of political action. This in turn leads to the necessity of dealing with the politics of organisational *order*, as well as of conflict (see Chapters Five and Six). This latter point points to another possible weakness in the political action view.

The second consequence of this view, that politics is a concrete process of social actions, also needs critical examination. The political action approach provides a dynamic view of the organisation as conflict-ridden and subject to changes internally created by cliques and cabals. While Burns and Dalton suggest that politics must necessarily be seen as a continual process whose dynamo is the energy and effort of interested individuals and groups, Mouzelis appears to suggest that this view is at the same time both too dynamic and too concrete.

"... the organisational image which finally emerges from Dalton's analysis, is a bewildering mosaic of

swiftly changing and conflicting cliques..."

(Mouzelis, 1975, p.159).

It is not quite clear why the mosaic analogy is used,<sup>29</sup> but Mouzelis appears to have doubts about the processual image which Dalton portrays.

What is "bewildering" is presumably the shifting unstable impression of political process that Dalton's research (but not Burns') provides. At one level Mouzelis' criticism is without substance, because Dalton certainly does not merely concentrate on "incessant intricacies and petty struggles" (Mouzelis, 1975, p.159) at the expense of larger conflicts and power struggles - indeed the "petty struggles" etc. are clearly treated by Dalton as concrete examples of action within recurring problem areas and "larger antagonisms" (see, for example, Dalton, 1959, p.4). However, the above quotation from Mouzelis (1975) points towards the more serious omission suggested above, viz. the failure to conceive of the organisation as a politically accomplished order, as well as a conflict arena and an ongoing process of change. Much of the theorising in Part Three of my thesis is concerned with correcting this imbalance of theoretical interest.

Instead of regressing to an externally-defined view of politics in terms of power structure or formal decision-making, as Crozier (1964) and Mouzelis (1975) would appear to recommend theoretically, I suggest that a fuller examination of the internal forces at work *within* the political process is required. It is necessary, for example, to develop the analysis of political strategy, not merely as an adaptive mechanism to help participants adjust to structural conditions (cf. Crozier, 1964), but as active components of political action (cf. Strauss, 1964; Martin and Sims, 1964). Political strategies are important links between political *action* and organisational structure and rationality.

The political action framework provides for the study of organisational conflict in terms of a process of clique behaviour and shifting alliances. In pursuing this line of analysis it is necessary to avoid oversimplifying the relationships between politics as informal, non-legitimate behaviour and the formal structure as a set of organisational constraints and between the concrete processual and the abstract structural aspects of power and conflict. Furthermore, since it is not sufficient to explain the state of organisational order by assuming the influence of stable structural constraints, we must apply the insights of Burns and Dalton - who attend to politics as an internally sustained process - to the problem of understanding order as well as conflict as a political accomplishment.

#### 3.2.4 Organisational Politics : The Eclectic Approach

(a) In the last three sections I have suggested that the topic of organisational politics has been explicitly approached from three different perspectives viz. the systems approach, the decision-making approach, and the interpretive/action approach. Each approach is distinctive in style and conceptual apparatus, although the first two have in common general structuralist premises about and formalist consequences for the theory of political behaviour. Other approaches are less distinctive and more eclectic in their theoretical frameworks, but most have focused on decision-making as the arena to be studied 'politically', and have started from the 'coalition' conception of Cyert and March. In this section I shall briefly consider the most important example of eclecticism, viz. Pettigrew (1973).<sup>30</sup>

The political model used by Pettigrew (1973) builds upon most of the frameworks examined in the last two chapters. His theory of organisational politics is ostensibly limited to the process of decision-making, although he actually offers empirical and theoretical insights far beyond that in scope. Pettigrew places his research in the context of Simon, Cyert and March, but he is far from happy with the

"... partial nature of the March and Simon ... and Cyert and March ... theories". (Pettigrew, 1973, p.273).

His intention is to extend and complement these theories, and he does this by drawing upon the structural-functionalism of the horizontal power approach with its facets of exchange theory, as well as the interpretive-sociological view just examined. More generally still, the study involves the *ad hoc* usage of concepts and ideas from all disciplines in the social sciences. The amazingly eclectic framework that results has a plausibility which rests upon the appeal to a multitude of traditions and upon a highly politicised theoretical language. Given the breadth of theoretical and conceptual language I think that it is both useful and necessary, if sense is to be made of the framework, to distinguish between the 'theoretical core' of the approach, and its 'theoretical and conceptual periphery'. The former includes the conceptualisation and theory of the political process which is embodied especially in his Chapter 2, while the latter refers to those theories and concepts derived from various sources just to add weight and legitimacy to an interpretation of evidence. I shall be concentrating only on the theoretical core.

The focal point of Pettigrew's study is an "innovative" decision to purchase a new computer, and the decision making process unfolds through the behaviour of three main groups of actors: the technical specialists (computer programmers and systems analysts) of Brian Michaels (the purchasing organisation), the same company's board of directors, and the representatives of the competing computer firms. In fact, Pettigrew effectively restricts his analysis to the historico-structural conflicts between the political activities of the technical specialists, who, through their authoritative representatives, attempt to influence the decision.

The theoretical core of the study comprises an analysis of organisational politics within the decision-making process as comprising two interrelated processes : first, the generation and processing of demands which arise from organisational subunits;

second, the generation of support for expressed demands, and the application of this support to those responsible for taking the decision.

Behaviour is political when it involves an attempt to influence the "authoritative allocation" (after Easton, 1965) of resources. Pettigrew starts from a structural-functional view of the organisation as a set of interrelated subunits which, having developed sectional identifications and interests, pursue their interests by making claims (or demands) on the organisation's resource-system. Since insufficient resources are available to meet claims, subunits are pitched into conflict relations, but unlike Cyert and March, this conflict situation is not resolved by rationalistic devices. Subunits attempt to impress their wishes upon organisational authorities, and thus upon their decisions, by using the power they can amass to further their own ends and block their rivals' ends.

The notion of power-mobilisation relates directly to the second political process - the seeking, building and application of support. The central concern in this process is with the *strategic use of power* in support of demands, and this may be seen as a considerable advance over the other approaches reviewed above. Power derives from the structural-functional character of the organisation, and accumulates through the possession of important resources and the creation of dependency relationships; but such an analysis of the sources of power is purely static, and it stops short of an understanding of political process :

"Knowing what resources a group possesses does not tell us how it uses them. How a group uses its resources, and with what consequences, will be a major issue" (Pettigrew, 1973, p.139).

The central issue in politics is thus the active use and manipulation of organisational resources and position to pursue sectional interests.

In summary, Pettigrew's theoretical framework is a political-conflict model, and political actions are partly determined by their historical context, partly by their structural context, and partly by the purposive strategies of contesting parties as they each deploy power resources to impress their will upon those formally charged with making decisions with allocative implications.

(b) Since Pettigrew's study is one of the very few theoretical attempts in the literature to analyse the organisation expressly in political terms *for its own sake*,<sup>31</sup> and because it is recent enough to have benefited from the approaches mentioned above, it is worthwhile assessing its contribution to the theory of organisational politics.

It is firstly worth noting that Pettigrew, in his analysis of the power-and-conflict processes leading to the computer purchase, takes decision-making theory beyond the rationalism of Cyert and March; in his analysis of concrete informal processes takes the study of organisational power and conflict beyond the statics and rigidity of the structural-functionalist and systems approaches; and in his analysis of the strategic use of power within the political process, makes a substantial theoretical advance on those rather undeveloped aspects of the political action approach. Without wanting to criticise Pettigrew unfairly for his perfectly acceptable choice of topic - which obviously needed to be relatively narrowly-defined to aid research - I feel that this topic, his conceptual and theoretical scope, his actual empirical work and his general eclectic 'philosophy' tend to leave a number of important questions unanswered. The six points that follow should not be seen as detracting from the considerable advance made by Pettigrew's efforts, but rather as abstracting from his research some important matters that need elaboration in Part Three of this thesis. First, the study is more-or-less restricted to 'horizontal' politics; second, the theory is once again a political-conflict model; third, the approach directs attention to the narrow field of formal decisions; fourth, it is not clear how the notion of

organisational politics is supposed to apply to other organisational arenas; fifth, Pettigrew tends to reduce politics to individual behaviour in his empirical work; and finally, it is necessary to understand the theoretical implications of eclecticism as a philosophy.

With regard to the first point, Pettigrew's analysis, being dependent of an initial structural-functional view of organisational power (see 3.1), reveals an image of political action as being almost entirely between horizontal subunits. The conflict between programmers and analysts constitutes the historico-structural context for politics and little attention is given to conflict and co-operation on the vertical dimension. This approach reveals the bias examined above, but one can point to Dalton's analysis of vertical cliques (Dalton, 1959, pp.58-60) to illustrate the relevance of the hierarchy as a source of politics. Pettigrew fails to examine the *political* relationships between 'head of department' level of the hierarchy and the levels above - the board of directors - and those below - the programmers and analysts themselves. This weakness is built into the theoretical framework, where the board of directors (to take the most obvious example) is given an almost independent, neutral role as authoritative decision-makers who are to be lobbied, persuaded and cajoled into *supporting* one demand or another. As a passive reflection of the balance of power below, rather than as politically active, partial participants who may themselves join political alliances with powerful groups below them, the board of directors is detached from the politics of decision-making - it appears that they make the decisions, whilst the lower echelons manoeuvre politically. The horizontal political behaviour of the department heads simply reflects the two key processes of demand- and support-generation and the possibility of interpreting a support-relationship (e.g. Kenny-Brewster) as itself a *political* relationship, hence introducing a vertical dimension of politics, is beyond the scope of the theory.

The second point concerns the narrowness of building a *conflict* model of politics, a problem which has recurred in all the approaches that have been examined. I shall be discussing the implications of this in 3.3 and 4.1 below.

The problem of analysing politics purely in a formal context has also been fully discussed above, especially in 3.2.3. It need only be repeated that it is unduly stifling to restrict politics to the study of formal decisions, such as a computer-purchase decision. Furthermore the view of decision-making as occurring within a neutral authoritative body to be democratically lobbied by political contestants acting more-or-less within rules acknowledging that body's rights and prerogatives, may be a neat reflection of pluralistic political ideology (see 3.3), but for a theory of organisational politics (or national politics) it can hardly be held as a rigid assumption.

The non-political role of the board of directors in this approach points to one organisational arena which, in Pettigrew's theory, remains more-or-less unpoliticised; furthermore Pettigrew only explicitly builds a theory of organisational politics that relates to the formal decision-making arena. These two observations lead to the fourth point of discussion viz. Pettigrew does not clarify the extent of application to organisational life of a theory of political process. He certainly limits the scope of the conception of politics to the horizontal dimension, and to the conflict phenomenon: but does he only see the process leading up to the taking of formal organisational decisions as political? It is important to extend the action of politics to other less grandiose, but still significant arenas of organisational life. Maybe Pettigrew does have a broader view than his study implies, since, in his Preface, he makes the following observation :

"A visit to any factory tea-break, office lunch gathering, or faculty meeting would seem to indicate that we are all familiar with shop-floor or office politics and bureaucratic gamesmanship" (Pettigrew, 1973, p.xv).

The implication is clearly that one need not look to the highest echelons of the organisation to study politics. Neither the shop-floor, nor the office have attracted much attention as political arenas.

The fifth point concerns the individualism that enters into Pettigrew's framework. Having been so critical of the tendency for March and Simon and Cyert and March to 'psychologise' decision-making processes (Pettigrew, 1973, p.22), it is somewhat paradoxical that, once he has set the structural scene of power and conflict, Pettigrew reduces the study of politics *per se* to the level of individual behaviour. This amply illustrates Pettigrew's eclectic ability to change theoretical horses mid-stream (see the sixth point below), abandoning structuralism once it has served its purpose, in order to give

"Particular emphasis ... to the part played by individuals in the structuring of social action over time". (Pettigrew, 1973, p.31).

Pettigrew's 'political' analysis becomes essentially the study of the computer-purchase decision as the outcome of the relationships between three individuals "representing" the technical subunits. Demands will of course tend to be expressed by individual representatives, but Pettigrew does not analyse the political relationships between these individuals and their 'constituents'. He considers it necessary to refer to the triad's subordinates in the preliminary analysis of the structure of power and conflict, but apparently they played no part in the political process itself. We saw above that the triad's superiors - specifically the board of directors - were inert in the political process, their decision-making by inference reflecting the patterns of dominance amongst the departmental heads. Effectively, and in spite of the theory that stressed the importance of acquiring political support in the organisation, power to influence the decision was more or less concentrated in the hands of a few strategic individuals.

It is pertinent to ask why Pettigrew ultimately locates the political process in the triadic behaviour of three individuals. At one level, of course, it is in the nature of field research to perceive behaviour as emanating specifically from individuals, as indeed it ultimately must do. Such a tendency however should be resisted, as a sociological theory of organisational politics must see its topic in its broader social context.

A second possible rationalisation of Pettigrew's resort to individual behaviour derives from his research method of participant observation. One of the important characteristics of political conflict is that social actors tend to perceive and interpret factors contributing to a political-conflict situation in personal and emotional terms. Burns (Burns and Stalker, 1961, p.143 and p.197), for example, notes the tendency for participants to individualise or even psychologise broader conflicts and problems. Might it be that Pettigrew, as an accepted member of the Management Services Department, simply reflected the commonly-held views (in personalised form) of the political process? This line of enquiry might be logically extended to answer another important question left unanswered, viz. why does Pettigrew see his particular three individuals as being at the heart of the political process, rather than others? It is of course possible that Pettigrew's triad were at the centre of political leverage with regard to the decision, but it is also true that Pettigrew's position of observation actually predisposed him to collect data mainly about his three main characters. Possibly, had he concentrated on the subordinate groups or the board of directors, they too could have been interpreted as conducting active political manoeuvres. This point feeds back into a number of queries raised earlier: it would seem that the nature and scope of politics very much depends upon the organisational arena observed, and it would appear foolhardy to presume that political process belongs only to one arena, or one level of the hierarchy, and so on; second, if the political quality of actions depends on the ability of the researcher to focus clearly upon them from his point of observation (both in terms of proximity to the actions and in terms of the insights of his politically-involved informants), it

is not surprising that the board of directors remained unpoliticised as a decision-making arena.

At a theoretical level, the legitimacy of Pettigrew's resort to the "individualisation" of organisational politics lies in his explicitly eclectic approach, whereby it is not only seen as unproblematic but also as a distinct advantage to draw upon concepts and propositions from such widely varying approaches as interpretive sociology and structural-functionalism. The broader implications of theoretical eclecticism need a brief comment, and this constitutes the sixth and final point of discussion in this section.

An eclectic approach has a number of apparent advantages over the various particular, often conflicting theories which prevail within an area of research. First and foremost, the eclectic theorist can claim an academic legitimacy for his work by drawing upon diverse traditions and receiving partial acclaim on all sides.<sup>32</sup> An equally important benefit derives from the eclectic's ability to invoke ideas and propositions from competing theories in order to clarify or elaborate observations of his own. This allows the development of a broadly-based theoretical language that provides both realism and support within the eclectic framework. Both the academic legitimacy and the theoretical plausibility that accrue to Pettigrew's approach are in a sense superficial, because he fails to perform the theoretical work necessary to *integrate* the ideas he borrows into a distinct, unified framework.

The superficial advantages of linguistic realism and theoretical plausibility must be weighed against the more profound weakness of Pettigrew's approach viz. he borrows concepts and propositions from many traditions but fails to recognise that these concepts and propositions *carry with them* assumptions and connotations that cannot simply be overlooked. The strength of eclecticism lies in the theoretical integration of diverse ideas; but quite often ideas and traditions are merely combined or placed in conjunction with each other rather than their underlying assumptions and rationales being considered, assimilated and reconciled within the philosophical

boundaries of a new and distinct framework. Pettigrew's eclecticism seems to reflect the former strategy which effectively sacrifices theoretical depth for the surface plausibility of linguistic realism. Instead of providing a genuinely eclectic (i.e. integrative) approach, Pettigrew creates a language of organisational politics which has a certain casual elegance that simultaneously conceals problems of a more profound theoretical nature.

Nowhere is this surface plausibility more explicit than in the unrationalised combination of structural-functionalism and interpretive sociology that I mentioned above. There is little attempt to reconcile these approaches by reasoned argument under the auspices of a clear set of premises; instead "integration" is accomplished by keeping the different theoretical viewpoints apart. Structural-functionalism is applied to the examination of the sources of power, and the interpretive approach is restricted to the uses of structurally-based power. This "mosaic eclecticism", which accomplishes integration by separation, undermines the rational foundation of the theoretical enterprise, and makes rather hollow Pettigrew's criticism of the 'political coalition' conception, that

"... while smacking of realism, it lacks depth of presentation". (Pettigrew, 1973, p.22).

In short, a theory of organisational politics must go beyond a language of organisational politics, if it is to acquire a deeper sense of empirical realism and theoretical validity.

### 3.3 The "Pluralist" Approach to Organisational Power and Politics

In Chapter Two, I argued that the theories of organisational power and authority examined therein, which focused attention of hierarchical power relations and the problem of order, could be understood, in a general sense, as being mutually supportive and compatible in the *unitary* conception of organisational power and

politics. I am now in the position to abstract the view of organisational power and politics theorised in the above approaches, with their general concentration on the horizontal dimension of power and their broad consensus about the 'political-conflict' nature of organisational life. In this section I shall briefly investigate links between this political-conflict view and pluralism.

### 3.3.1 The Pluralist Image of Politics

The theoretical development that has emerged during the last two chapters, from static models in which political order is conceptually imposed or formally/constitutionally assumed, to processual models providing a conflict image of politics is not unique to the sociology of organisations. The change from the static-order model to the processual-conflict model of politics reflects a theoretical dynamic that is part of history in the three larger arenas of social life - those of national politics, of community politics, and of "industrial politics". In political science, the abandoning of descriptive constitutional work in favour of the analytical study of conflicting or competing interest groups was largely accomplished in the 1950's (cf. Truman, 1958, for the classic statement on interest group politics in the national arena). The vogue for studies of community politics during the 1950's in many ways predated (in theoretical terms) the national studies, and the development is not so clear because of the lack of interest traditionally shown in this area. However, the conclusions of such studies, often emphasising the apparent wide diffusion of power amongst conflicting interests in the community, fed directly into the theory of the national political system. This 'pluralistic' conception of the sociopolitical system proposed a situation

"... in which the power of the state is shared with a large number of private groups, interest organisations, and individuals represented by such organisations". (Presthus, 1971, p.331; see also for example, Dahl, 1961; Polsby, 1960).

Accompanying the development of pluralism in the study of the national and community political arenas, was its application to the industrial sphere. Nowhere has this been clearer than in industrial relations theory. The association of pluralism and the industrial relations system has a fairly long history in the U.S. (where, indeed, its strongest general proponents work) with the work of Dubin (1954) and Kerr (1954, 1964) being overtly "liberal-pluralist" (cf. Eldridge, 1973). Before 1960, 'industrial relations' in Britain was more-or-less historical and constitutional-descriptive in its scope. Partly because British work in this area suffered a general lack of 'theory' (cf. Wood and Elliott, 1977, p.106), itself related to a feeling that the *practical* area of industrial relations should remain firmly "on the ground"<sup>33</sup>, the advocacy of a general framework only emerged in the 1960's. The accepted framework was explicitly pluralist, the best-known statement of which belongs to Fox (1966).

Although his interests are firmly rooted in the broader industrial sphere of employer-employee relations, and the purposes of his article is to propose a realistic 'frame of reference' for management, the general elements of the political-conflict model that has emerged in this chapter are clearly recognisable in Fox's pluralistic view of the industrial enterprise :

"... an industrial organisation is made up of sectional groups with divergent interests..."  
(Fox, 1966, p.4)

"The participation of organised labour [for our purposes, subunits] in decision-making means that managerial prerogatives are thereby curbed."  
(Fox, 1966, p.7).

"... management has to face the fact that there are other sources of leadership, other focuses of loyalty, within the system it governs, and that it is with these that management must share its

decision-making... It follows from this that conflict is endemic to industrial organisation" (Fox, 1966, p.8).

" [The acceptance of this pluralistic reality allows] ... for the development of more sophisticated bargaining techniques designed to reconcile management and work-group interests at a higher level of mutual advantage". (Fox, 1966, p.10).

It would appear that the theory of organisational politics, based upon a political-conflict model, more-or-less reflects the pluralistic image of political systems.

### 3.3.2 Pluralism and Political-Conflict Models

It is immensely naive to speak of pluralism as *one* framework, since it inevitably involves a number of variants according to the assumptions upon which it is based (cf. Playford, 1971, p.365ff.). Similarly, while all the approaches to organisational politics as outlined above do share a concern for the politics of conflict relationships, they differ in other significant aspects. In the following pages I intend to treat the 'political coalition' conception, the 'political subsystem' conception and the 'eclectic' conception as if they formed a "dominant" political-conflict model i.e. explicitly or implicitly, as theories of organisational politics which they generate are in certain essentials equivalent. Furthermore I shall argue that they constitute a variant of the general theme of pluralism. The 'political action' view, which differs in certain significant respects (e.g. the non-legitimacy of cliques and clique behaviour) may be treated as a less restrictive variant of pluralism.

The dominant political-conflict model as a variant of pluralism may be formulated as having several characteristics.

The first of these characteristics is frequently taken as the defining feature of pluralism viz. that the organisation creates by its very logic a system of conflicting power groups each pursuing its own sectionalist interests and together resulting in a balance of power (cf. Fox, 1966, p.4; Fox, 1973, p.192 ff.; Presthus, 1971, p.335; Playford, 1971, p.365 ff.; Eldridge, 1973, p.159; Miliband, 1973b, p.5). The structural-functional analysis of power and dependence and of conflict and differentiation leads directly to a view of conflicting functional groupings (cf. Zald, 1970, p.242; Pettigrew, 1973, p.17; Hickson et al., 1971, p.217; Abell, 1975, pp.11-12), whereas Cyert and March's non-structural theory of coalition formation is equally explicit (March, 1962, pp.672-673).

Second, there exists the direct concern with formal decision-making, and the stress on "key" decisions (cf. Dahl, 1971, p.359; see Lukes, 1974, p.13) which is reflected in the dominant political-conflict model, with its focus of organisational decisions and goals of a formal kind (see 3.2.1, 3.2.2 and 3.2.4 above). Third, the parties who participate do so within the generally agreed set of rules and procedures which provide a formal arena for conflict resolution and decision-making. This acceptance of the constitutional rules and procedures (cf. Fox, 1973, pp.196-197; Playford, 1971, p.364; Presthus, 1971, pp.335-336; Zald, 1970, p.225ff.; Cyert and March, 1959, p.84; Abell, 1975, p.17) leads to the consideration of interest groups as legitimate *within* that framework of rules (cf. Playford, 1971, p.368, and his quotation from Dahl, same page). Within the organisational sphere, legitimacy (and, by the way, rationality) is attributed to groups according to their functional position. This acceptance of the constitutional framework reflects a desire on the part of all interest groups to ensure mutual survival (Fox, 1966, p.4; Wood and Elliott, 1977, p.110 ff.; Crozier, 1964, p.107).

The last of the characteristics of the dominant political-conflict model would appear to be the least general, and points to

a particular variant of pluralism. In this variant there exists a top echelon of management or administration, but while

"... those in high places may appear to have great power ... in reality they are only mediators among conflicting interests for whose power and support they must continually bargain". (Presthus, 1971, p.332).

Whereas Presthus speaks of this top level as "disinterested umpires" (ibid.), Playford proposes an analogous "referee version" of pluralism (Playford, 1971, pp.369-371).<sup>34</sup> In the dominant political-conflict model, Cyert and March's executives as 'political brokers', Zald's "authoritative office holders" (Zald, 1970, p.243), and Pettigrew's board of directors play this neutral role (cf. also Crozier, 1964, p.163), which Miliband describes for the national level as follows :

"... the state is only the mirror which society holds up to itself". (Miliband, 1973b, p.6).

In brief, the dominant political-conflict model suggests a version of pluralism in which conflicting functional subunits compete within an accepted framework of rules in order to influence the decision-making body by a process akin to political lobbying.

In Chapters Two and Three I have examined the politics-related literature on organisations by considering in detail how social scientists have academically theorised organisational power and politics. Two major types of approach have emerged, categorised as "unitary" and "pluralist", each concentrating on theorising the topic in terms, respectively, of political order and of political conflict. In Chapter Six and in Part Three, I shall be developing this order-conflict distinction as one conceptual theme that can inform the interpretive analysis of organisational power and politics. In Chapter Four, the emphasis will be on extrapolating a second conceptual theme based upon Bachrach and Baratz's (1971) distinction between the "two faces of power".

## Chapter Three

### NOTES

1. In Chapter Nine I shall develop a concept of political strategy, but its role is not restricted to being adaptive to organisational circumstances.
2. In this context Clegg (1975, p.50ff.) has certainly misrepresented Crozier, who does not "thoughtlessly deploy" Dahl's concept. It is doubtful whether this reference to Dahl is any more than the casual obligatory acknowledgement of Dahl's work. Crozier might borrow Dahl's definition as a starting point, but his effective conception of power is somewhat different. This is not to say that there is 'underlying unity' of Crozier's and Dahl's views in some other more abstract sense - such a unity assuredly does *not* stem from the former's use of the latter's definition (see 4.2).
3. This has become a key proposition of that organisational approach called "contingency theory" in the U.S. and "task analysis" in the U.K. cf. Thompson (1967); Lawrence and Lorsch (1967); Perrow (1967); Perrow (1970a); Woodward (1970). Abell (1975) has attempted to develop a power approach to organisations from this base - see 3.2.2.
4. The thesis relating power to dependence has been developed by Emerson (1962, 1964) and has become incorporated in exchange theory as a general criterion for the emergence of power (Blau, 1964, p.118ff.). See 1.2.1 above. On functional autonomy, see the classic paper by Gouldner (1975).
5. Peterson (1970, pp.92-93), in his comments on Perrow's paper, rhetorically asks whether the results of a reputational study of power would correspond to those of some other (say, behavioural) study. In a recent methodological note, Pennings (1973/4), on the related topic of organisation structure, performs a comparison of 'objective' and 'subjective' methods. He concludes that there do arise discrepancies between the pictures of the organisation which throw serious doubts upon the comparability of different methods.
6. Perrow does make an intuitive statement about how groups can use their position and power to sustain that power independent of "natural" causes - a so-called "distortion thesis" - but this interesting insight is entirely without theoretical status in his approach (1970, p.67).
7. There appears to be a very close relationship between this formulation and the classic functional conception of power as expressed by Dubin (1960, pp.506-507). The idea of

7. (cont'd)  
irreplaceability ('substitutability' in Hickson et al., 1971, pp.220-221) is clearly related to Dubin's dimension of 'exclusiveness', and 'centrality' has its parallel in Dubin's 'importance' of a function.
8. As a corollary, it could be noted that a hint of social legitimacy is provided by the reference to "some selection of role definers". Since the only members of an organisation who would almost by definition subscribe unproblematically to the (social) legitimacy of institutional authority, are organisational designers and those top decision-makers whose positions are underpinned by such authority, we may conclude that these 'role definers' are a minority group and their legitimation cannot be assumed to indicate a normative authority.
9. Zald effectively argues that the political and economic aspects of the organisation enjoy some kind of theoretical priority over other aspects, which makes the concentration on them more efficient and illuminating (1970, p.255). Such a narrowing of focus overcomes the diffuseness of the general systems approach. It is distinctly probable that Parsons would agree with this focus in the case of formal organisations, which, after all, by his own recommendation, are characterised by a "... primacy of orientation to the attainment of a specific goal" (1956, p.64).
10. Cahill and Goldstein (1964) develop a similar view of the political process, but choose to focus on the individual's relationship to it.
11. The systems approach seems to be especially prone to this sort of problem because it purports to account for social life at all levels of analysis. Parsons has frequently been accused of slipping unconsciously between analytical and concrete statements, as when he apparently uses interchangeably the notions of 'social system' and 'society'; or when he treats his four functional areas as units of concrete behaviour.
12. Gouldner (1954), in his discussion of the theoretical implications of his gypsum mine study, distinguishes between types of bureaucracy, according to the interests served by different patterns of rules. His 'punishment-centred bureaucracy', based on formal rules which serve one party's interests at the expense of another's, would appear to be a pertinent example of how an apparently neutral pattern of rules can become the focus of overt dispute, as well as political leverage (see also 9.3).
13. Zald (1970, p.245) misleadingly refers to the internal political structure. It is patently clear from his discussion of centralised and decentralised structures (pp.243-4) that he is referring to constitutionally-

13. (cont'd)
- defined power structures, i.e. institutional authority.
14. Burns (1969) and Dalton (1959, Chapter 6) - see 3.2.3 below - conceive the career structure of the organisation as being an important source of political motivation. Equally, both of these theorists see the problem of managerial succession as raising essentially political questions, rather than following formally-established procedures unproblematically. (cf. Burns and Stalker, 1961, p.221).
15. The logic of this approach is sociologically investigated in the broader societal context by Berger and Luckmann (1971, 78ff.). These authors refer to three "moments" of the social process, internalisation, externalisation and objectivation. Cyert and March imply that organisational goals are created by participants' interaction (externalisation) and these goals then take on a semi-permanent character as they are objectified by processes of institutionalisation (Cyert and March, 1963, pp.32ff.). 'Objectified' goals may then be considered as relatively independent of the actors who created them, hence possessing a truly *organisational* character.
16. Abell's work on organisations as "influence and bargaining systems" (1975) shows some similarities to Cyert and March's model of collective decision-making. Derived from Woodward's "task analysis approach", Abell develops a model of intraorganisational power based upon similar theoretical and methodological assumptions to those of Cyert and March. Thus, bargaining power is a conflict phenomenon (Abell, 1975, p.11) concerning a "dominant coalition" (ibid.) of influential actors who participate in a plurality of intersecting, normatively constrained, bargaining zones (Abell, 1975, p.33). Through a process of influence, bargaining and compromise, they shift (accommodate) their beliefs (i.e. "preferred outcomes") and move unproblematically towards consensual collective decisions. These theoretical similarities are complemented by Abell's "operationalist" (globalist and empiricist) philosophy which recommends a methodology similar to Cyert and March's (and Simon's) behaviourism (cf. Abell, 1975, p.13ff.).
- Since general structuralism and operationalism are well represented in Part One, little is added to the arguments by a detailed consideration of Abell's work. As will be apparent from the brief sketch above, his arguments fit well into the pluralist type of approach.
17. Incidentally, Cyert and March fail to explain *how* environmental constraints operate on the political process of organisations to permit "viable" coalitions but prevent others.

18. This is again a consequence of behaviourist assumptions, whereby inaction is taken to indicate "satisfaction", "legitimacy", and "positive" acceptance. See 2.1.3.
19. A similar sort of rationalism permeates Abell's (1975) operationalist account of influence and bargaining power. It is remarkable, to say the least, that political interactions in "... complex - very complex [sic] - decision-making structures..." (Abell, 1975, Preface) may be rendered as follows :
- "... the MPOs[i.e. modified preferred outcomes] are a linear additive function of the multiplicative interaction between IPOs [i.e. initial preferred outcomes] and the subjective saliencies". (Abell, 1975, p.19).
- Such, it appears, is the "very complex" richness - algebraic convenience? - of political life.
20. The rationalism of this approach finds its logical extreme in the example that Cyert and March use to illustrate coalition behaviour i.e. the selection by a nine-man committee of a painting for the village hall (1963, p.31). This decision is reached by rationally collating expressed preferences (see also Cahill and Goldstein, 1964, p.364ff.). In this example, as in their theory of the organisational coalition, Cyert and March fail to analyse how fairly obvious political matters may influence the choice process e.g. preferences may not be constant but subject to influence by other more powerful members; or the decision process may be influenced by historico-emotional factors influencing alliances.
21. Cyert and March do not explain what this means, or who the "few" parts are, or what distinguishes the few from the many in terms of the organisation, or in terms of their political behaviour.
22. Because of this focus, I see these approaches as studying politics as organisational *action*, in the Weberian sense.
23. We have noticed in Part One so far, how the inability to distinguish power from institutional (formal) authority has often led to a rigidity of conception that deprives the theorist of many political aspects of the organisational process.
24. See, for example, Geiger's comments (Dalton, 1959, pp.78-79).
25. Burns himself rejects the argument that cultural differences are a causal influence, suggesting that they are created as subgroups attempt to *rationalise* a conflict situation by attributing attitudinal and cultural differences to rivals

25. (cont'd)
- (Burns and Stalker, 1961, pp.139-140). On *a priori* grounds, one might suspect that both propositions are partially correct.
26. It should be noted that the 1955 paper is not explicitly written in a political context, but it is not very distant in theoretical terms from the later work.
27. Gore (1956, p.289) also conceives of a 'clique' in a quasi-political sense. Bucher (1970, p.34) resorts to the notion of a 'coalition' but conceives of it in terms of a "shifting alliance" - very reminiscent of Dalton's political conception.
28. It could be argued that Burns' analysis of the organisation as a plurality of systems (1969), by stressing politics as belonging to a distinct 'system', contradicts his insight that politics should be seen as the 'colour' of a piece of action, and hence places the theory back in a systems framework. However in treating systems a 'social Gestalten' (1969, p.247), or an interpretive system, Burns renews his action orientation.
29. This mosaic analogy would seem to imply a static "bitty" or compartmentalised view of the organisation, whereas Dalton provides (and this is what Mouzelis sees as Dalton's contribution) a very dynamic, highly interrelated or 'criss-cross' image of shifting alliances and of clique membership.
30. Another example of such eclecticism is the work of Harvey and Mills (1970). They combine the insights of Cyert and March's approach, with a structural analysis reminiscent of Perrow (1970b) and Hickson et al. (1971).
31. More empirical approaches have focused upon organisational (e.g. "factory") politics, and these will be drawn into my arguments in Part Three. I am thinking particularly of Beynon, 1973; Nichols and Armstrong, 1976; Nichols and Beynon, 1977.
32. It does, of course, work the other way as well, when a theorist of one persuasion finds his ideas in conjunction with those which he may consider to be alien.
33. For a lucid exposition of the fallacies underlying this view of the relationship between pragmatism and theory, see Eldridge, 1975.
34. Another variant treats the state (or government) as just one of the many interest groups competing with each other. This would appear to be a general theme in the pluralistic approach to industrial relations (cf. Fox, 1966).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ORGANISATIONAL POWER : ITS NEGLECTED FACE

#### 4.1. Beyond Pluralism and Political-Conflict

##### 4.1.1 Political Order and Political Conflict as Organisational Orthodoxy

In Chapters Two and Three, I investigated in depth a number of approaches which, by virtue of the topics they address and the concepts with which they operate, appeared to have something to say about organisational power and politics. In these contributions to the literature I have discerned two types of approach which together seem to constitute a conventional orthodoxy. The "unitary" and "pluralist" types of approach in turn produce one major conceptual theme - of order and conflict as political phenomena - which requires development in Part Three. In the present chapter I shall be examining the main thrust against the organisational orthodoxy, this thrust being embodied in what can be seen as a "radical" critique of the pluralist view of politics. I shall first be introducing the general lines of critical argument, and, in 4.2 and 4.3 below, looking at the one piece of research to apply the critique systematically to the organisational field, viz. Clegg (1975; 1977). In the final section 4.4) I shall abstract from the discussion a second conceptual theme - symbolised by the so-called "two faces of power" - which will be carried forward into Part Three as a basis for theoretical development.

The organisational orthodoxy referred to above incorporates the 'hierarchical' theories of political order (Chapter Two) and the 'horizontal' theories of political conflict (Chapter Three). The former approach provides an implicit view of organisational power and politics in terms of a static, given state of order and consensus. In this view, knowledge of the formal aspects of the organisation (goals, rules, institutional authority etc.) is sufficient to understand how the organisation achieves a (rational) state of order. Seeing the organisation as possessing

"... a unified authority and loyalty structure, with managerial prerogative being legitimised by all members of the organisation" (Fox, 1973, p.186) these theories share with Fox's famous concept of managerial ideology, unitary assumptions about organisational behaviour, the consequence of which is to de-emphasise conflict, or, indeed, its possibility. By imposing order by assumption or neglect, it further fails to see stability and consensus as processual, socially created, phenomena.

The horizontal theories of organisational power and politics - see Chapter Three - allow and encourage a view of their topic in explicitly conflict terms. During the last chapter it was evident that the 'political-conflict' model of the organisation has become rather an academic consensus among those theorists who have concerned themselves with the *politics* of organisational life. Although not reducible to one *theory*, the contributions in question share certain characteristics - e.g. conflict as politics; study of concrete decision-making; equilibrium assumptions - that group them together as variants of 'pluralism'.

At the end of Chapter Three, I related this development of organisational order and conflict approaches to the theoretical movement in the political analysis of broader social arenas. This movement from 'unitary' to 'pluralist' views of power and politics reflects a change not only in the dominant *ideology* of organisational control - Fox's concern - but also in the dominant mode of academic theorising about organisational control.

#### 4.1.2 The 'Radical' Critique of Pluralism

While the analysis of political behaviour in organisations has become increasingly based upon pluralist assumptions about organisational reality, this same set of assumptions regarding the political arena at the national, community and industrial levels has more recently been subjected to an extremely cogent and pervasive critique.

The critique of pluralism, which emerged historically in the pluralist *versus* elitist dispute (cf. Dahl, 1971; Mills, 1956), finds its most articulate expression in the 'two faces of power' thesis of Bachrach and Baratz (1971; 1963; other critics such as Wolff (1965), Miliband (1973b) and Lukes (1974), extend the basic critique in various ways). Just as this critique was reaching its most sophisticated level of statement with respect to national and community politics, British sociologists of industrial relations were becoming unhappy with the (by then) orthodoxy of Fox's pluralism. Fox himself (1973; 1974a) has led the way by arguing that the apparently greater realism of the pluralistic view is in fact only a surface realism, and goes on to propose that a more "radical" view with greater depth of argument and less dependence on "what we know" culturally<sup>1</sup> is an essential precondition to understanding the reality of industrial relations<sup>2</sup> (see also Eldridge, 1973; Goldthorpe, 1974). However, the intellectual and emotional commitments that the postulate of pluralism has created amongst political scientists, political sociologists, and industrial relations theorists, have not much permeated organisational sociology.

The general critique has operated at two levels - of ideology and of reality. It is true that these two aspects of pluralism cannot be treated in isolation of each other, since the

"... creation of myths as powerful symbols or the ability to use them as between conflicting parties is part of the warp and woof of industrial relations [in our context, organisational life]" (Eldridge, 1975, p.10).

However I shall be mostly concerned with assessing pluralism as a *realistic* theory of organisational politics.

The political-conflict or pluralist approach does provide a more realistic and more plausible (sociologically) view of organisational politics than the static 'unitary' view, which assumes more than it explains, but it does not go far enough. Its realism and

plausibility still rests on a number of assumptions which overlook more profound issues of central significance to understanding the shape and nature of politics in organisations in Western industrial society. It has become fashionable to refer to critiques of pluralism, and the alternative view of politics which they offer as "radical" (cf. Fox, 1973; Lukes, 1974; Wood and Elliott, 1977), both because the political-evaluative connotations of the arguments reflect basically Marxist premises, and because they attack the theoretical roots of the prevailing orthodoxy.

Before moving to the only attempt to apply this radical critique to *organisational* studies of power and politics, I shall briefly consider the nature of its theoretical rebuttal of pluralism. The essence of the argument is that the focus of pluralism upon expressed conflict amongst interest (functional) groups neglects the inherent structural and cultural forces underpinning, and indeed defining, the political arena, and in so neglecting inevitably (i.e. by virtue of its own theoretical and methodological logic/bias) encapsulates only the superficial politics of the system and simultaneously reflects and reinforces the dominant ideology of the *status quo*. Power is wielded, in other words, through the inbuilt characteristics - structural and cultural - of the political arena, because any organisation, with its institutionalised procedures, mechanisms and principles, is biased towards its own perpetuity. This is the central issue raised by Schattschneider's famous 'mobilisation of bias' concept, which Bachrach and Baratz (1971, p.380) have used so effectively in the community power debate. This conservative bias, which is part of the "organisation" and can be studied as the second - and neglected - face of power, is partly why the powers-that-be rarely need to make a concrete show of strength, thereby contributing to the pluralistic, competitive image of politics :

"[one]... reason why the powerful rarely need to make their power visible and obvious is that all the social institutions ... which it is essential for them to have accepted and legitimised are accepted and legitimised already and come under no serious threat". (Fox, 1973, p.209).

The issue of the (social) legitimacy<sup>3</sup> of these institutions raises cultural and ideological questions about the foundations of the politics of order and consensus. People acquire their attitudes and values towards politics and organisational participation through their experiences of society and its institutions, and education, the mass media and other socialising agents are themselves subject to the same bias. As Fox again argues,

".. their [i.e. the powerful's] very power affords them the facilities for creating and maintaining social attitudes and values favourable to that acceptance". (ibid.)

This problem requires a critical analysis of how institutions influence members of society such as to maintain the "ideological predominance" of the powerful (Miliband, 1973b, p.162 *et passim*) - and how

"... the dominant values and political myths, rituals and institutions ... favour the vested interests of one or more groups, relative to others" (Bachrach and Baratz, 1971, p.382).

It also opens us the rather delicate issue, inherited from Marx, concerning the distinction between 'false' and 'true' consciousness. The problem of the power of ideology, and its self-fulfilling properties, feeds back into the radical assessment of pluralism itself, which in reflecting the surface appearance of power and political-conflict, reinforces both the myth (from which it partially derives) *and* the 'reality' which it purports to describe (and must so describe because of its own theoretical and methodological premises).<sup>4</sup>

In some ways, the 'radical' critique of pluralism directs attention back to the issues of the 'pre-pluralist' era, by stressing the forces of social and organisational order which inhere in the (socially legitimate) constitutional framework of rules and duties.

The major difference is that the radical view encourages a depth analysis of the socio-political processes whereby order and consensus are achieved, whereas the unitary view establishes order and consensus either by fiat or by default. This concern for order can, however, lead to a neglect of manifest social conflict, which is frequently dismissed (by implication) as illusory or insignificant by virtue of it having no tangible effect on the power and social structure of the society or organisation. Needless to say, this does not constitute a sufficient reason, sociologically, for omitting reference to manifestations of political conflict, it merely serves to warn against unreflectively giving the latter significance and qualities it might not possess.

Another problem with the radical view of power and politics as it has developed to date, is the confusion between personal power and structural constraint. This dilemma haunts many radical theorists and finds its most lucid expression in the Miliband-Poulantzas debate.<sup>5</sup> Given the postulate of voluntarism - the inviolable premise of this thesis - it is essential for the development of an interpretive sociological analysis of organisational politics to reject with Miliband (1973a) what he has called "structural superdeterminism".<sup>6</sup> Equally, care must be taken not to retreat into a form of idealism - a theory of organisational politics without a notion of constraint is as meaningless as one whose actors are the

"... merest functionaries and executants of policies imposed upon them by 'the system'"  
(Miliband, 1973a, p.311).

To accept this latter state is effectively to have turned the full circle from a 'unitary' theory, to 'pluralism', and back to 'unitary' theory - albeit underpinned by a *politically* radical critique.

The radical critique of pluralism needs to be examined in an organisational context, and Clegg's recent theoretical and empirical study of organisational power on a building-site (Clegg, 1975) allows

such a critical evaluation to have an academic focus. His approach is particularly apposite because of his expressed interpretive sociological interests.

#### 4.2 Clegg's "Critical Understanding" of Organisational Power

##### 4.2.1 Introductory Remarks

In this and the following section I shall be specifically interested in explaining and assessing Stewart Clegg's "critical" approach to organisational power (1975; 1977), which embodies the burden of the radical critique of pluralism. Clegg's contribution to the analysis of organisational power is profoundly important not only because of his specific incorporation of the radical critique, but also because he generally raises in the organisational context social scientific issues and debates that have hitherto been avoided by researchers in this field. In considering one particular strand of academic theorising about organisational power - what I have called "interdepartmental power" - Clegg (1977, p.27) comments with some surprise on the isolation of such an approach from the community power debate.

"One consequence of this has been the uncritical application of a concept of 'power' which has been subject to extensive criticism" (ibid.).

In this quotation, Clegg is referring to the oversight of Bachrach and Baratz's "two faces of power" thesis (1971, 1963; see also Lukes, 1974). His theoretical and empirical aim is to present a view of organisational power which delves beneath the superficial description of political conflict normally associated with the pluralist approach, in order to discover the "second", "deep", "structural" face of power that has been neglected by conventional "vulgar" organisation theory (Clegg, 1977, p.31).

In the following pages I shall be arguing that Clegg's contribution to the study of organisational power and politics revolves

around the nature of the issues he raises rather than in the solutions he recommends; further, in Chapter Six, I shall suggest that these issues may be construed as being generally complementary to those raised by the Burns/Dalton political action approach. In order to understand Clegg's view of organisational power (and politics), it is necessary - as it has been for all theories investigated in Part One - to reveal the ways in which the concept has been *effectively* deployed in his theorising.

One's academic theorising is, in part at least, a dialogue with one's own "theoretic form of life" (Clegg, 1975, p.36 ff.); however, as one might expect from a sociologist claiming a *phenomenological* disposition (Clegg, 1975, p.viii) but having a veritable *structuralist* task, the traditions which constitute Clegg's theoretic form of life are quite diverse. It is his reading of Bachrach and Baratz, Wittgenstein, ethnomethodology and Weber that informs his arguments on organisational power, and these various strands are held together by a common thread - a depth analogy.

#### 4.2.2 The Depth Analogy and the Critique of Pluralism

In spite of taking a different line of argument, Clegg's analysis of interdepartmental studies of power suggests, as does my own, that their implicit view of their topic shows a startling resemblance to that promulgated by pluralists - in particular, pluralists in Dahl's behavioural tradition. Clegg argues that such researchers (e.g. Crozier, 1964; Hickson et al., 1971) have been misled by their concentration on surface behavioural displays of power in conflict relationships into overlooking the deep structural grounds which make those displays possible in the first place. Following Bachrach and Baratz (1971), Clegg seeks to study organisational life - or at least, excerpts from it - in order to reveal those structural principles which enable the exercise of power. This is a concern, not with concrete displays of power - its first face as reflected in studies of interdepartmental power and conflict - but with the second, hitherto neglected face of organisational power:

"... [Bachrach and Baratz's critique] demands an account of the 'rationality' of power in whatever scene is under study, a rationality under whose domination issues become a transparently 'ruled' phenomenon. Such a perspective would not propose that the power displayed in any one exchange was a chance outcome of that exchange alone, but would instead look at its possibility" (Clegg, 1975, p.54).

This argument - that the variety of surface behavioural displays urges explanation in terms of a *deep* structure (rationality) which allows for such displays while simultaneously ruling out a wide range of never-displayed, never-considered behaviour - exemplifies a number of traditions in structuralism from anthropology to linguistics, and Clegg intends to apply its logic to his topic in order to represent the 'two faces of power' thesis. Instead of implicitly conceiving power in organisations as a series of apparently ungrounded (i.e. free-floating or structurally 'random') games of managerial influence, Clegg suggests that organisational power - the capacity to exercise which is structurally governed - is exerted over issues routinely and unreflectively ruled 'proper' and 'significant' by virtue of their rationality in terms of the organisation's *raison d'etre*. Some issues simply are not raised as matters for political debate and competition, and such 'non issues', and the 'nondecision-making' which leads to their absence, are part of organisational politics in spite of their behavioural invisibility (cf. Bachrach and Baratz, 1971; 1963; also Frey, 1971).

Clegg enlists Wittgenstein in order to help resolve two problems in his thesis : first, in the assessment of academic theories of organisational power, and their relative status vis-a-vis the reality they purport to understand; second, in the analysis of his empirical conversational data (i.e. 'lay' theorising) from which he attempts to abstract a picture of structural power. Again, it is the depth analogy, applied to Wittgenstein's concepts of "language-games" and "form of life" which attaches the philosopher to Clegg's cause.

Theorising, whether academic or lay, may be understood as a language-game, ruled and patterned by communally accepted conventions ('grammar') which render acts of theorising sensible and coherent (Clegg, 1975, p.32 ff.). Theorising *qua* language game - like power displays and other concrete acts - cannot be understood as the creation of the occasion (as many ethnomethodologists recommend), but must make reference to those community rules, conventions and customs (academic traditions, for the social scientist) which make observed acts of theorising possible (and others impossible) :

"Theoretically, we can constitute both our own theoretic endeavours, and those of everyday theorists, as language games of a possible society which attain their rationality from an organising iconic form of life". (Clegg, 1975, p.38).

In other words, the deep structural principles which enable language games to be as they are, belong to Wittgenstein's concept of "form of life". The latter is normally so routine, so mundane and taken-for-granted, that its enabling characteristics - like the second face of power - has been neglected by all methodologies which insist on comprehending theory and talk as surface displays of action.

With this understanding, Clegg examines the first problem referred to above, viz. how to assess 'competing' academic theories (and concepts) of power. He identifies an underlying unity between academic theorising about organisational power and pluralism in general (Clegg, 1975, p.50). This arises because such theorising constitutes a variety of moves in a language game which is unified, not necessarily by a visibly common set of categories, but by being grounded in the same tradition, the same unreflective ways of 'doing' organisation theory, the same theoretic form of life.

"The differences of the [organisation] texts, the variables deployed, the arguments used, these are only explicable as moves in a language game whose implicit differences are rooted in a deep sameness of one tradition of discourse, that of positive, positivist speaking and writing" (Clegg, 1977, p.28).

The theoretic form of life gives the diverse acts of theorising a rationality which binds them together for a common point and purpose - the form is life is thus "iconic".

Having said this, the real differences in theorising that occur, as in the hotly disputed community power debate, suggest the existence of deeper structural variance. Clegg goes to great lengths with unbelievable complexities of conceptual discussion to show the fairly simple point that the controversy of the pluralist/ elitist struggle lies in conflicting traditions and rationalities (forms of life), which deploy different grammars and apply different criteria for ascribing truth.

Possibly more important is the way Clegg uses Wittgenstein's terminology to suggest a method for retrieving a picture of the neglected face of power from the recorded conversations of organisational participants. In his interpretation of Bachrach and Baratz (see above) and of Weber (see 4.2.3), Clegg suggests that power is grounded in a rationality with which the dominant 'form of life' of the organisation is imbued; as we have seen, lay or everyday talk/theorising also, unthinkingly, reflects the point and purpose (form of life) of participants' existence in that organisation. It is subsequently possible to examine conversational data in order to discover the rationality, the icon of organisational life, which underlies the actions of participants. This rationality not only gives point and purpose to 'talk' in organisations, but also determines 'significant' issues and distributes the prior capacity to exercise power i.e. it reflects the second face of power.

Only one problem remains, if this argument is valid - how to bring to the surface of language games that which is "bed-rock", taken-for-granted? Ethnomethodologists have built their discipline upon the study of the routine, unquestioned occurrences, and they recommend that the "background expectancies" which sustain the 'normal' flow of social events may be examined by interrupting the latter. Following this advice, Clegg exploits a 'natural' fracture of organisational life, whereby participants perceived the organisation as a "failure". By investigating the nature of this 'failing' Clegg abstracts from talk about it, an image of what the organisation should be. Such a culturally shared image of what a "good", "rational" organisation is, may thus be seen as the organisation's iconic form of life, which provides the structural/rational grounds for both power, and theorising about power.

To theorise organisational power further, Clegg develops an interpretation of Weber's analysis of power and bureaucracy within the framework of his depth model. We now come to the theoretical core of his critical approach, the "trinity" of concepts - power, rule and domination.

#### 4.2.3 Power and Domination : The Two Faces of Organisational Power

I am not concerned with the validity of Clegg's interpretation of Weber's typology of power, but with his use of Weberian concepts to support the depth structuralist view of power. Clegg distinguishes between the *concrete exercise* of power and the *prior structural capacity* to exercise it, the former belonging to the first face of "power", and the latter to its second face i.e. "domination".

Power is therefore a form of social action which takes place at the observable surface of organisational behaviour, but, as with language-games, its exercise is not a free floating, random act that is the outcome of the specific occasion of its use. This latter image emerges from interdepartmental studies, and makes organisational life look

"... rather like an ongoing game of chess in which the pieces gain their power through their current position, rather than gaining that current position through the power to make moves according to the rules of the game." (Clegg, 1975, p.49).

Power is not an apparently arbitrary social action, because its exercise is a "ruled enactment" (Clegg, 1977, p.32).

What power enacts in a 'ruled' purposeful manner is a capacity already allocated to various positions in the organisation in relation to the realisation of the organisation's *raison d'etre*, its form of life. This prior structure of capacities may thus be seen as the grounding, the very possibility of power in the first face (Clegg, 1977, p.32) - it refers to what Weber has called the "structure of dominancy" which provides the order governing the way the organisation works (Clegg, 1975, p.60).

That which gives an organisational 'order' its point and purpose is its societal context and institutional location. For industrial organisations in capitalist society<sup>7</sup>, the principles which determine the network of prior capacity reflect the economic foundation of the organisation's very existence. The economic power of the "icon of capitalism" - its market system, its ideal of profitability (Clegg, 1975, p.119ff.) - makes rational a certain distribution of power capacities within the organisation, so that the structure of dominancy is "economically conditioned" (Clegg, 1977, p.32). Domination is the political form of life of the organisation, embodying the aforementioned economic power, and towards which organisational participants "ultimately" orient their action i.e. in terms of which they make sense of or "iconically theorise" their everyday existence (Clegg, 1975, p.90).

#### 4.2.4 The Mediating Concept(s) of 'Rule'

Clegg's interest in the second face of power as a deep-lying structure of dominancy is, on the face of it, difficult to

reconcile with a prior commitment to a phenomenological perspective. In fact, the credibility of Clegg's approach, if we assume that Clegg accepts the postulate of voluntarism, depends overwhelmingly on his analysis of how actors theorise their organisational lives in the context of "domination" (see 4.3.2). This in turn, as Clegg recognises, relies "crucially" and "decisively" on the concept of "rule" in his framework :

"... the concept of 'rule' provides a crucial link between the structural concept of 'domination' and the action concept of 'power' ... [It] is the decisive link between the person's social action of power, and the 'authorisations' of domination". (Clegg, 1975, p.67).

In Clegg's thesis (1975), there appear to be *three* concepts of 'rule': as 'formal codification' and social convention; as the political action "to rule", as monarchs traditionally do; as the interpretive procedures with which actors make sense of their social experiences. These meanings do, of course, overlap, but, although they are *not* identical, Clegg fails to distinguish between them. Somewhat artificially, it may be most useful to consider the first two concepts as being closely related to Clegg's explanation of how 'domination' influences 'power'; whereas the interpretive concept, being mostly concerned with how people comprehend 'power' and 'domination', is more related to his explanation of acceptance or obedience (see Figure 4.1 below).

The first two concepts of rule - the 'formal' and the 'political' - derive from Weber's work on power. In order to clarify the confusion over interpreting Weber's terminology, Clegg suggests that *Herrschaft* be rendered by the notion of rule. In this political sense, 'rule' is the act or process of exercising power over other people. The concept of rule as 'formal'/social convention is abstracted from Weber's analysis of bureaucracy, in which 'rules' are part of the organisational order, external to social actors, but oriented to by them. Rules in this latter

formal/conventional sense are constituted and made rational by the structure of dominancy, which defines the structural capacity to exercise power. Concrete enactments of organisational power may be seen as "commands" which

"... would be what we might call 'authored' by the 'rule'. They would be what we might call 'authoritative' commands." (Clegg, 1975, p.62).

Organisational power arising through and legitimated by formal/conventional rules may thus be seen as 'political' rule (*Herrschaft*) - the exercise of a 'rule' (formal/conventional), or 'authority'.

"Authority refers to the 'exercise' of a 'rule' located in a 'structure of domination', in which resides the 'capacity' to 'exercise' that 'rule' more or less authoritatively". (ibid.).

Power (authority) is exercised *within* the arena "defined" (Clegg, 1975, p.67) or structured by domination as a form of life, and is *about* the pursuit of organisational rationality, viz. the ideal of profitability :

"... power relations are only the visible tip of the structure of control, rule and domination which maintains its effectiveness not so much through overt action, as through its ability to appear to be *the* natural convention. It is only when taken-for-grantedness fails, routines lapse, and 'problems' appear, that the overt exercise of power is necessary. *And this is exerted to reassert control*". (Clegg, 1977, p.35; my emphasis).

Power is about rationality, control and the establishment of organisational order, which is accomplished both routinely, through conventions, rules and procedures - the second face of power - and,

if that fails, through the political and authorised exercise by managers of such conventions, rules and procedures.

At this juncture, the third concept of rule - the 'interpretive' one - is particularly important as a means of "softening" the so-far deterministic image of domination. Participants are affected by the structure of dominancy because they orient their actions towards it i.e. because the organisational order is subjectively meaningful. Rules and conventions may be the basis of authority (Clegg, 1975, p.65) and of the impersonal order, but "how one orients towards [the order] is problematic" (Clegg, 1975, p.61) :

"'Domination' underlies the surface appearance of power-exchanges, mediated by members' interpretive rules with which they orient their behaviour towards the 'icon' of domination". (Clegg, 1975, p.77).

Being the form of life of all participants, (the icon of) domination has an irrepressible presence that must be theorised and thereby influence organisational life in its political dimension. Managers theorise their place in the process of organisation for profitability - a rationality which endows them with political capacity - and others orient to the same organisational order to acquire their sense of work. Both organisational power itself, and theorising about power - using "commonly held" (Clegg, 1975, p.67) and "collectively recognised and publicly available" (Clegg, 1977, p.31) interpretive rules for perceiving and evaluating power - are made possible and structured by participants' shared, normally taken-for-granted, form of life.

For Clegg, theoretically and empirically (Clegg, 1975, p.87f), power is authoritatively exercised by managers, and such commands are normally submitted to without thought. Both power and its acceptance occur routinely, because power is exercised within the structure of dominancy for "obviously" rational control purposes.

Order is accomplished through 'domination' (and power) because it is "*the* natural convention" - the organisation's unquestioned form of life.

The organisation's form of life accounts for power/ authority through making the latter possible; it is biased towards the accomplishment of organisational order because it, and its rationality, is known by participants, without their conscious realisation, as normal and natural.

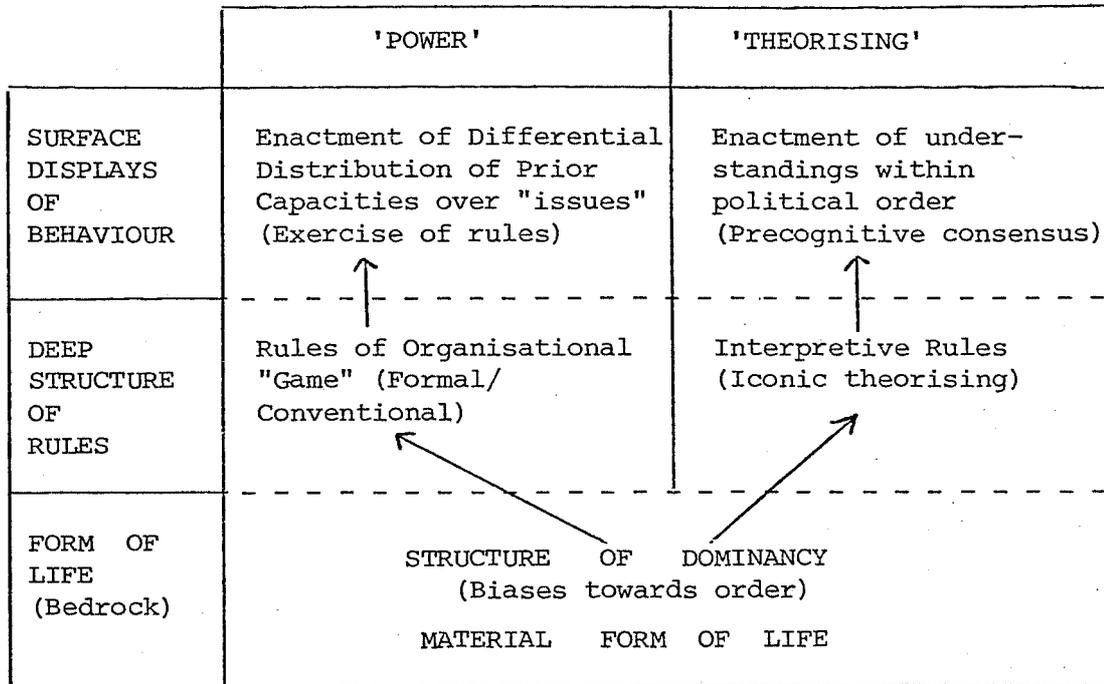
"... we may be so embedded within the iconic theorising power of a particular form of life, a particular form of domination, that an unthinking, unthought consensus reigns supreme in our daily life ... [The] security of the ruling convention and interest is rarely disturbed". (Clegg, 1977, p.21).

#### 4.2.5 Summary : Power and Submission

Clegg's arguments are long-winded and often tortuous, and the above dissection of his work serves as a foundation for the critical examination to follow. Before proceeding, I think that it will prove helpful to summarise the themes of Clegg's argument, and hence pull the various strands together. Figure 4.1 serves to illustrate *my* understanding of Clegg's theory.

The starting point of Clegg's analysis is the second face of power - domination - which, reflecting the organisation's material form of life, is given, unquestioned by wielders (managers) and recipients (others) of power alike. Because of its iconic, ideal qualities for those whose lives are enmeshed in the way the organisation works, this form of life gives rise to formal rules/social conventions which usually succeed in obtaining order because they are taken-for-granted. Where routine submission is not forthcoming, the rules are exercised by managers.

Figure 4.1 The Two Faces of Organisational Power (and Theorising) as a Depth Model



The same material form of life which makes possible the hierarchical, managerial exercise of power (left-hand column in Figure 4.1) is the focus of the iconic theorising of all participants. By orienting to the structure of dominancy managers develop differential understandings of 'significant' issues, and lower participants unthinkingly adopt the organisation's domination of their existence. Interpretive rules may differ from manager to manager and from manager to worker, but they all start from what is "obvious", from what is accepted communally before its apprehension i.e. precognitively.

The enactment of power capacities (i.e. the realisation of structural biases towards order) and the precognitive acceptance of domination, leads to a form of "hegemonic order" within organisational life.

#### 4.3 Domination as Structural Constraint and Organisational Order

This detailed examination of Clegg's academic theorising of organisational life allows me to probe critically the answers he provides for his theoretical questioning of the second face of power. His approach raises issues of immense theoretical importance for the understanding of organisational power and politics, but, as often happens when theorists attempt to correct an imbalance of attention in the literature, Clegg tends to overstate his case. His arguments serve as a timely reminder to organisational orthodoxy of the pluralist variety that power is hierarchical, formal, structural, constraining and conducive to order; but at the same time Clegg defines as insignificant, and unworthy of examination, 'power' which is horizontal, informal, active, providing opportunity and conducive to conflict. In general, my arguments will be that Clegg provides basic insights into the second face of power - domination - but, because of a failure to develop an interpretive sociological understanding of everyday organisational theorising, he overlooks the significance of power, and variations in it, at the first face. Further that, largely because of the same failure, domination is presented *effectively* as structural constraints which favour only stability and order. From another angle, such a bias arises because Clegg is not 'radical' enough, neglecting the fundamental insights of the Marxist tradition in organisational analysis (cf. Eldridge and Crombie, 1974, p.136ff.).

In 4.2 (particularly 4.2.5), I suggested that Clegg's theory of domination (as a form of life) really operated in two ways : first, to explain the distribution and functioning of organisational power as it is exercised; second, to explain how participants, through their precognitive commitment to the domination as a form of *their* lives, come to accept domination as inevitable, and the exercise of power as legitimate. In order to clarify Clegg's conception of organisational power and politics, I shall look at these "explanations" of 'power' and 'acceptance'. It will then be possible to see in what ways such a conception needs to be extended in the interpretive sociological framework. Because, in my opinion, Clegg's weaknesses mostly arise through his failure to study the significance of variations in how participants theorise power and politics, I shall deal first with his explanation of acceptance.

#### 4.3.1 The "Unthinking, Unthought Consensus"

It is clear from Clegg's declared intention to study the neglected face of power using a depth analogy, that the main burden of his argument would be *structural*. For a sociologist with a commitment to phenomenology, it is incumbent upon him to reconcile this structural focus with the postulate of voluntarism - a duty which Clegg appears to realise by providing the concept of interpretive rule with a mediatory role, and by seeing the sociological relevance of domination in its social interpretation by organisational participants. While the centrality of an adequate theory of this interpretive process to a meaningful understanding of organisational power and politics is thus uncontended, Clegg's account of the topic stresses the ways in which actors are constrained by their form of life to "unthoughtfully submit" to its "iconic domination" (Clegg, 1975, p.155). Through such submission, the deep structure and surface exercise of power are not only 'obeyed', but also "accepted", "authorised" and "legitimised" (Clegg, 1975, p.77).

Unthoughtful submission to and consequent legitimation of organisational power is an empirical possibility - if Clegg is correct, it occurred on his building-site, or at least in management site-meetings, in 1972/3. However, I would suggest that his theory (and empirical research), with its assumptions, definitions and omissions, effectively allows no other feasible conclusion to be drawn from observation i.e. as a theory, it forecloses on other empirical possibilities by not providing a way to observe and examine them as significant *social* occurrences. In what follows, I shall look at the definitions and assumptions which restrict the theory of organisational power and politics to one of hegemonic order, and indicate a number of theoretical omissions - failure to conceive structural conflict or important variations in the everyday organisational theorising of power and politics - which demand remedying. I shall end the section by illustrating how Clegg's view is reinforced by his interpretation of conversational data.

Although Clegg argues that the way organisational order is oriented to is problematic, by theoretical argument he reduces the possible variations in orientation to those falling within one dominant mode; that which (iconically) comprehends organisational life in terms of the organisation's material form of life. I am not questioning the theory of the relationship between 'theorising' (language game) and a 'form of life', because it seems entirely reasonable to suppose that actors' interpretive work takes place and is rational in the context of their 'normal' mode of existence. However it is problematic to assume, subsequently, that participants *consistently* theorise under *one* icon - that reflecting the organisation's rationality. Of course participants will inevitably and necessarily take account of organisational rationality, but, as I shall argue below, it is myopic to consider its theorising power to be monopolistic, or indeed internally consistent. Clegg's conclusions about the structure of dominancy being a deep force in the service of order, and being the subject of a general precognitive consensus, depend crucially upon assumptions built into his conceptual framework.

Precognitive consensus arises through the assumption that the structure of dominancy is a bedrock 'form of life' for both 'organisation' and individual participants, because the very definition of domination in 'form of life' terms presupposes that it is 'accepted' without reflection (Clegg, 1975, p.34ff.). Where the deep structure of power is routinely submitted to and where it is plainly foolish or suspicious to question it (Clegg, 1975, p.84) - i.e. where it is 'bedrock' - participants' interpretive work will tacitly confirm domination, control and rationality. There will, in short, be an "unthinking, unthought consensus" (Clegg, 1977, p.31) about organisational order.

Such implicit domination of participants' thinking and theorising - i.e. hegemony - is a very important means of accomplishing organisational order and control through the very presence of a prevailing rationality (ideology) and structure. However, Clegg has omitted to provide for the examination of two important aspects of

political life, which make less secure and more precarious the structure of dominancy: first, the analysis of form(s) of life and social rationalities should reveal the *structural* possibility of conflict as well as order; second, the analysis of interpretive rules - theorising - based upon underlying forms of life should uncover the social possibility of varying degrees of acceptance *and rejection* of organisational order. Such possibilities need to be available *within* a theoretical framework, not grafted on when examples are empirically encountered.<sup>8</sup>

I shall consider the first omission and its consequences for understanding power in organisations. The focus on domination as a prior structure of power capacities is obviously essential in a thesis aimed at redressing its neglect, but it is surprising that Clegg should tie it so unreservedly to the problem of organisational order. As mentioned above, the arguments that participants are entrapped by the rationality of formal organisation and that, therefore, there is one clear, unambiguous form of life with respect to which they can make sense of their work, seem to contravene much of what we know about organisational life in industrial society. It is possible for the *raison d'etre* of work to vary considerably from group to group, and for participants to orient towards organisational order in a similarly divergent manner. Adapting Clegg's arguments, theorising may be underlain by diverse forms of life, for example, located in extra-work spheres like the family, politics and religion. In such a case, there may still be precognitive acceptance of the form of life - as is a defining characteristic of the latter - but there is also the possibility of its rationality conflicting with that prescribed by the organisation's material form of life. Conflicting forms of life - structural conflicts - may influence the process of organisational politics, disturbing Clegg's hegemonic order, in diverse ways through the interpretive activities of participants<sup>9</sup> (see also discussion of the second "omission").

Structural conflict arises not only between forms of life, but also within the material form of life of the organisation. In

spite of his later references to Marx, Clegg (1977) continues to assume tacitly that the economically conditioned structure of dominance (Clegg, 1977, p.32) may be seen as internally coherent in its bias towards organisational order and control. Marx's analysis of the internal contradictions of the structure of capitalism, intensified or nullified according to changes in the economic conditions, suggests that the second face of organisational power would be better conceptualised to reflect both structural order and conflict (see 7.4) - with further repercussions for the nature of lay theorising (see Chapter Eight).

Clegg's second theoretical omission which lends support to his hegemonic view by neglect concerns his analysis of the interpretive activities of organisational participants:

"My answer has been that what maintains the order of this society [i.e. organisation] is its members' unthoughtful (*and thus willing*) submission to the iconic domination of a form of life in which the ideal of profitability is King Harvest - it must be reaped" (Clegg, 1975, pp.155-156; my emphasis).

By reducing variation in everyday organisational theorising of power to the "willing acceptance" of the icon of capitalism and its associated rationality, Clegg restricts theoretically - i.e. artificially - the empirical possibilities of conflict and change.

To extend this argument, consider what Clegg can mean by "willing" "submission". Organisational participants "accept" the deep structure of power because it is their (presumed) material form of life. They accept it mostly without thinking about it, because it is - and herein lies its great power - "*the natural convention*". Submission as a political act is iconically theorised, and, within his framework, Clegg offers lower participants very little alternative but to submit. His analysis is largely insensitive to different modes of everyday theorising, and to *degrees* of acceptance (or of rejection). Acceptance, obedience and submission occur

because they, like the exercise of power, are underlain by rule and domination, and as a consequence, their very occurrence is taken to indicate the social legitimacy of the organisational order.<sup>10</sup>

In Chapter Eight, I shall be proposing that organisational order may be theorised and accepted in various ways, from moral acceptance, associated with social legitimacy, to begrudging pragmatism, without any such association. In the latter case obedience, and the political order itself, can become highly precarious under certain circumstances. It is just such a possibility that Clegg's blanket equations of 'power' and 'authority' and of 'acceptance' as 'willing legitimation' are too obtuse to acknowledge. Overlooking power as 'coercive rule' - in spite of referring to it (Clegg, 1975, p.59) - leaves Clegg's theory of organisational order as "deeply" consensual and hegemonic, and he neglects the possibility - explicit for example in *Gramsci's* concept of 'domination', as opposed to hegemony (see 7.5) - that under certain conditions, order must be *forced* by the powers-that-be, thereby creating the structural potential for conflict, disorder and change.

If Clegg's analysis oversimplifies the politics of order by neglecting 'shades' of acceptance, his approach overlooks altogether the possibility of rejection - and the relationship, hinted in the previous sentence, between theorised acceptance and rejection. I have shown that 'conflict' is relegated to the first face of power as an 'insignificant' matter, and is not considered at the deep structural level. Only in a short parenthesised comment does Clegg speak of the possibility of "subverting" the structure of power, which can only occur

"... through a rejection of the dominant icon as has happened - as a temporary aberration - during factory occupations which have occurred after the icon has been shattered by the facts of bankruptcy and the subsequent loss of jobs" (Clegg, 1975, p.124).

Rejection does occur "temporarily" under certain economic-structural circumstances, and, presumably *could* happen on a permanent basis. However, the analysis of power as domination, of domination as structural order, and of theorised submission as hegemony, can explain neither the structural nor the social possibility of these events - nor, even more importantly, their social dynamics. On rejection, resistance, challenge and change Clegg is strangely silent.

The restrictive view of everyday organisational theorising is further reinforced by Clegg's empirical research. First, and most obviously, the concentration of the research on managers may be expected to be supportive of his arguments on acceptance. Managers and executives would seem, on *a priori* grounds, to be the most probable groups to submit their organisational lives to the "iconic theorising power" of the material form of life (see 8.4.1). Second, Clegg's treatment of conversational data seems to be especially likely to produce an image of a socially defined order.

Rightly eschewing the representational model which assumes a one-to-one relationship between linguistic image and reality (Clegg, 1975, p.8ff.), Clegg's strategy is to construct a picture on a 'good' 'rational' organisation from participants' talk of the 'failing' organisation. Since participants perceive a 'good' organisation as hierarchically controlled, disciplined, profitable etc., this image is assumed to be an icon in terms of which participants theorise their organisational existence, and to which they willingly submit.

I would argue that the links between 'talk', 'iconic theorising' and 'willing submission' are rather more complex than this, although I have not the space to discuss them fully. However, the major problem is that Clegg treats 'talk' as if it *is* 'theorising', whereas it is certain that the oral use of language - even if we assume that participants are consistent theorists (see 8.6) - is but one expression of an actor's theory or theories. One utterance, or even many utterances in one situation, may be congruent with a large number of possible theories.<sup>11</sup> The

economics and politics of organisational life are part of our culture, embedded in the very language - its categories and grammar - which make up 'talk', so to treat talk as theorising can be highly misleading. The shop steward and manager, Marxist and Conservative, who share the same culture and language, can "agree" on what is "wrong" with British industry because they use the dominant means of expression - but their apparently similar 'talk' cannot be taken to indicate an "unthinking unthought consensus".

If organisational power and politics are to be understood without implicitly depending on power as structural constraint, it is critical to develop a framework of concepts and propositions which provides an adequate understanding of how participants themselves theorise their organisational lives. Clegg fails to do so.

#### 4.3.2 The Critical View of Organisational Power and Politics

I have argued that Clegg's account of 'acceptance' of or 'submission' to power and domination is unsatisfactory in that it fails to analyse the process of social interpretation - i.e. of the human mediation of structural forces - in a way that can other than reinforce the organisational order. In the present section I shall be concluding the examination of Clegg's thesis by discussing the overall view of organisational power and politics which emerges from his theoretical and empirical work. Bearing in mind what has been suggested in 4.3.1, I shall look at power and domination and at what this means for the political behaviour of managers and other participants. The results will affirm my contention that, for Clegg, organisational power as domination - the neglected face - acts effectively like structural constraint, which more-or-less reinforces the prevailing state of order.

Domination, as an iconic form of life for academics and lay participants alike (Clegg, 1975, p.113ff.), is a structure of power (capacity) which provides the means whereby the ideal of

profitability is rationally accomplished. This rationality operates first to determine those issues which are organisationally "critical" or "significant" and second to distribute hierarchically the capacity to exercise power in its service.

"Given that power, when it is exercised, is exerted over 'issues', then the crucial point would be to determine which issues are critical for the organisation (which implies the corollaries of non-criticality and non-issues) ... I suggest that a critical issue will be one which affects the ideal of profitability as it is manifested in the organisation's model(s) of rationality". (Clegg, 1977, p.35; also Clegg, 1975, pp.123-124).

Power in organisations is therefore exercised over (understandings of) 'issues' which are 'critical' in the above sense, as participants with the prior capacity to do so, attempt to enforce their particular views of the ideal of profitability mirrored in such issues.<sup>12</sup> Power is exercised *within* the arena defined by rationality (domination) and the organisation's material form of life (which "grants" the power - Clegg, 1975, p.124).

It is not surprising, given this 'rational' notion of power, that the capacity is hierarchically distributed to higher positions (e.g. Clegg, 1977, p.35) so that, while the capacity to exercise power is ultimately structurally determined, but its actual exercise is exclusively in the hands of managers. On his building site,

"... the exercise of power ... [concerns] negotiations concerning ... [the organisation's] mode of rationality, negotiations which are managed by the Project Manager, and which occur within his willing submission to the structural power of his form of life, as willing cog and cypher". (Clegg, 1975, p.100).

Power, which is formal, hierarchical and involves the authoritative use of rules to further profitability and order, is inevitably managerial, in spite of being underlain by domination and rule.

I have shown in 4.3.1 above how Clegg argues for the unquestioning, hegemonic acceptance of the structure of dominancy, but what does this view of power and acceptance imply about political behaviour first, among managers, and second among "lower participants"? Clegg's theoretically-based decision to study managers - *because* domination "grants" them power - tends to reinforce his ideas about acceptance. On *a priori* grounds, he is probably correct to argue that managers and executives may theorise organisational order in terms of its (normative) rectitude (see 8.4.1), but is it right to assume that, in their "willing submission" to structural power, they only use their power capacity to further organisational rationality - the "collective good"? If we conceive of managers as politicians, it is possible that they would attempt to *claim* legitimacy for "partial" acts on grounds of the common good, or, more technically, within the terms formally established for control purposes. Such claims will manifest themselves in public 'talk' and *appear* as willing submission to the organisation's 'form of life'. *In reality*, the structural capacity to exercise power may be enacted - or even avoided - in order to pursue sectional goals which are *made accountable* in terms of the ideal of profitability. The power of managers may usually be grounded in their orientation to domination, but, without detailed study of that orientation - "willing submission ... as ... cog and cypher" is but one extreme mode of theorising - the socio-political realisation of the prior deep structure of power must remain problematic.

Clegg (1977, pp.26-27) takes Hickson et al (1971) to task for reifying departmental power by assuming that the manager's voice speaks and his behaviour acts for all his subordinates. However, such a criticism is equally applicable to his own approach. The exercise of organisational power *is* managerial power, and the political role of lower participants is to "unthoughtfully submit"

and hence *legitimate* such power. For Clegg, lower participants do not exercise power, because it is not rational for them to have that structural capacity. Where they do "influence" organisational affairs (because it is not 'power' by definition), that influence, not being grounded in rule and domination, is insignificant - such are the surface displays that have deceived pluralists.<sup>13</sup>

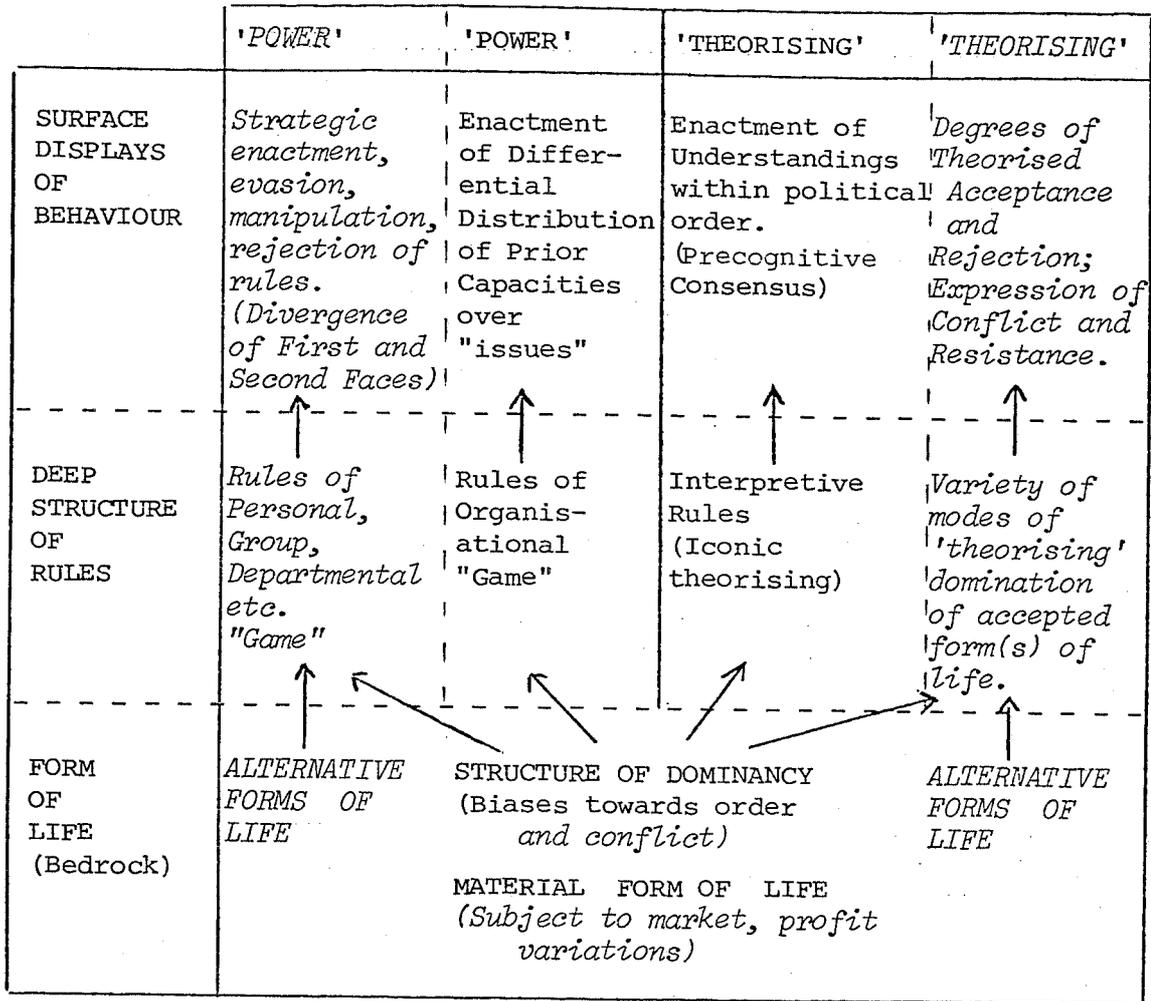
I have already suggested that the everyday organisational theorising of participants might be located in forms of life which differ from, or even oppose, the organisation's structure of dominancy, with associated implications for their interpretation of organisational life. Similarly, the power of participants - i.e. non-managers *and* managers in certain circumstances - may extend beyond the formal hierarchical distribution of capacities recommended by organisational 'rationality'. Clegg, in his limitation of power to the latter context, is only capable of theorising a pure Gramscian 'moment' of hegemony - the latter *may* have existed on his building-site, but it does not constitute a theory of organisational power. If a normative identification with organisational order is seen as but one empirical possibility, it follows that participants at all levels may ground their 'power' in other rationalities which oppose, challenge or resist (in varying degrees) the extant form of domination. Orienting to differing forms of life will make different 'issues' critical *for the theorists*, and may provide other structural sources of power which cannot be condemned as "marginal". By ruling such political possibilities out of his theoretical framework, through a set of mutually-reinforcing conceptual definitions, Clegg constructs not only a "closed" academic theory of organisational power (see 5.1.1), but also an ideological support for political order, seen as self-sustaining and hegemonic in spite of its real precariousness.

In summary, I believe that it is unnecessarily restrictive, and highly undesirable sociologically, to attach by definition the conception of organisational power to 'order', to 'control', to 'hierarchy', to 'management', and to '*organisational* rationality'.

The result, when linked to the lack of an adequate interpretive approach (which partly gives rise to and reinforces that conception), *effectively* provides an image of organisational power as structural constraint<sup>14</sup>, and overemphasises the impossibilities of social-political action. Clegg rightly stresses the need to study the second face of power, but his structural solution of constraint and order cannot by itself provide a foundation for the interpretive sociological understanding of organisational power and politics. Unless power also 'endows' participants with social opportunities backed by the 'emotion' and 'energy' of politics, organisational conflict and change will always have to be explained by theoretical 'grafting'.

I shall end this discussion of Clegg with Figure 4.2, which replicates Figure 4.1, and adds the various possible extensions, which have been discussed, and which will require further elaboration in Part Three.

Figure 4.2 Possible Theoretical Extensions within Clegg's Depth Model



1. Clegg's view of organisational power and politics.
2. Suggested extensions of Clegg's view.

#### 4.4 Summary of Part One

In the previous three chapters I have conducted detailed and critical analyses of the main theories of organisational power and politics. The depth of this examination was required by the need, explained in Chapter One, to discover how the various theories effectively conceptualised the topic in question.

I have first argued that the theories of organisational power can be meaningfully grouped within three general *types* of approach. Those researchers who have focused upon the vertical aspects of 'power' in organisations and the problem of order provide a view of the topic which may be classified as "unitary"; those whose work has concerned the horizontal dimension of power and the problem of conflict, offer a basically "pluralist" approach; Clegg's thesis which reflects in many ways the radical critique of pluralism, I have categorised as "critical". Each type of approach has a distinctive conception of organisational power and politics.

From the discussion in Part One, there has emerged two important conceptual themes<sup>15</sup> - those of order/conflict and of first face/second face of power. The first theme is especially relevant in understanding the differences between the unitary and pluralist types of approach, but all conceptions of power and politics at least imply some treatment of the two ideas. The radical critique of pluralism, on the other hand, embodies the second conceptual theme. Clegg's approach, as the only developed example in the field of organisations, distinguishes between the concrete exercise of power (what I have been calling 'politics') and the 'power' of structures which bias or predispose such exercises.

In their treatment of the topic of the present thesis, I have been particularly impressed by the ways in which two theories handle the conceptual themes in question. The 'political action' framework of Burns and Dalton, and the 'critical' approach of Clegg seem to provide fundamental insights into the question of organisational power and politics. Each looks at the question in

very different ways and highlights different aspects of the topic; as I shall argue in Chapter Six, their respective strengths and weaknesses appear to complement rather than overlap. Part Three unfolds around the themes outlined and the conceptions implicit in each type of approach, and serves to develop and extend theoretically those themes and conceptions within the parameters outlined in Chapter One.

Before commencing the latter task, it is important to establish more clearly the methodological and theoretical basis of an interpretive sociological analysis of organisational power and politics. The starting points of this groundwork, which occupies Part Two, are a methodological anxiety about circular arguments in the above literature, and the theoretical problem of reconciling the postulates of voluntarism and of constraint.

NOTES

1. I have already used a similar kind of argument against the 'linguistic' realism of Pettigrew's study (3.2.4).
2. In a recent paper, Wood and Elliott (1977) argue that Fox's 'radicalism' is in fact still underpinned by pluralist-like assumptions, reflected in the concept of 'trust' and his continued attachment to reformism in *Beyond Contract* (1974a).  
  
The failure to be 'radical' enough has also been levelled against Bachrach and Baratz (1971) by Lukes (1974). Lukes argues that Bachrach and Baratz do not break from the essential pluralist (behavioural) premises which they themselves criticise.
3. It is debatable as to what extent 'social legitimacy' or mere 'passive acceptance' as unalterable of what exists, accounts for the manner in which political order is sustained (see Mann, 1970; also 8.4).
4. This circularity reflects the 'resource/topic' debate initiated by ethnomethodologists to make a similar 'radical' point viz. that, in their view, conventional sociology did not probe beneath the surface of social reality in order to attain a deeper knowledge of the principles of social life.
5. Reprinted in Urry and Wakefield (1973).
6. It is interesting to note that Poulantzas' conception of power is at once both similar to the Parsonian view and the direct opposite. Both theorists conceive of power as a property of systems or structures, but Parsons argues its 'positive' resource or functional aspects, whilst Poulantzas sees power as a negative (though functional) constraint.
7. Clegg restricts his analysis to organisations in the institutional area of industry, although the form of argument may address other types of organisation (see Clegg, 1977, note 8). In Part Three I shall make a similar restriction for the purposes of illustrating theoretical arguments.
8. Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine follow up these arguments. Concerning the restrictive nature of Wittgenstein's notion of form of life for sociological analysis, see Giddens, 1976, p.17 and p.51. Giddens' discussion is largely in the context of Winch's (1958) interpretation of Wittgenstein.

9. For example, the privatised worker attaches a meaning to work and the organisation which is often at odds with the 'traditional' worker (cf. Lockwood, 1966; Goldthorpe et al., 1968), and we may understand these differences in terms of their orientation towards different forms of life. Such variation in theorising, grounded in differing forms of life, may have similar or contrasting consequences for organisational power and politics e.g. privatised workers may be more "volatile" in their industrial relations, and such surges in industrial conflict may result from conflicting forms of life.
10. This insensitivity to degrees of acceptance, and the latter's variable relationship to legitimacy, is reminiscent of Simon's behavioural concept of authority (see 2.1.2).
11. For example, Clegg finds it ironical that joiners may locate the organisational failing in being 'overstaffed', thereby "... theorising the legitimacy of their own dismissal" (Clegg, 1975, p.91). However it is perfectly rational to say such a thing - given the facts of organisational life on a building-site - without being committed to any ideological/theoretical viewpoint about how to remedy the "problem". Indeed, such talk may be geared to Clegg's questioning, expressed in the terminology of management (and of students who spend time with management). Having expressed this view, the joiners could still fight tooth and nail to prevent dismissals on either practical, personal or ideological grounds.
12. It is not clear what happens to matters (non-issues?) which are "non-critical" and which presumably are not raised to the level of political action. Clegg's definition implies that non-issues, being non-critical, do not "affect" "the ideal of profitability"; it would be surprising if this were so, since one might want to argue that it is precisely 'non-issues' (as in Bachrach and Baratz's (1963) or Frey's (1971) sense of being safely decided outside the political arena) which appear to relate crucially to matters of profit, market logic etc.
13. For example, Clegg (1977, p.26) calls the power of Crozier's maintenance men "marginal and discretionary", as if that were sufficient to deny its sociological significance.
14. Such a deterministic image is underscored by the depth analogy, with its own connotations of external constraint - connotations apparently recognised by Clegg (1975, p.74) in his comments on Cicourel (1973).
15. The third conceptual theme of possibilities and impossibilities is also implied in my investigation of these approaches, but it becomes more explicit in the theoretical work of Chapter Five below.

PART TWO

A METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL BRIDGE

## CHAPTER FIVE

### METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THE ANALYSIS OF ORGANISATIONAL POWER AND POLITICS

This thesis is entirely theoretical, but the ideas produced are intended to be of empirical and of scientific use. It would appear that a great deal of academic sociology takes the form of *a priori* theorising, this being seen as a primary research activity under the auspices of the 'hypothetico-deductive' method of enquiry. Given the significant amount of *a priori* theorising that takes place, it is surprising that so few of the participants in this activity have given explicit consideration in their written works to its scope, method and function (cf. Baldamus, 1976). This thesis is not - indeed, could not be - profoundly methodological, but it seems to me that it is "healthier" to indulge explicitly in a short philosophical diversion than to leave such matters implicit and unacknowledged.

The impetus behind this decision comes from a distinct feeling of unease, gained from the reading of purely or mostly theoretical treatises. Many of the theoretical works reviewed in Part One seem to share the characteristics that they are eminently sensible, completely internally consistent, and *invariably worked*. This latter feature would not have been so disheartening, except that some of these theories lead to some quite absurd, implicit, conclusions about the social and organisational world. To cut a long story short, since I do not want *my* theorising to have the last characteristic, it is necessary to examine what is "wrong" with the prevailing style of academic theorising and to plot an alternative course. Section 5.1 is concerned specifically with this problem, and the exploration of an alternative methodology, which reassesses the function and process of *a priori* theorising with the particular aim of making the latter sensitive to the variations in and possibilities of empirical reality.

The theme of possibilities also dominates 5.2 which revolves around an important theoretical problem in interpretive sociology -

that of constraint. This thesis commences from the theoretical assumption of voluntarism, which is taken to be inviolable. As mentioned in 1.1, a common criticism of the interpretive approach has been that it cannot incorporate an effective notion of constraint, a proposition which, if true, would nullify any attempt to study power and politics from an interpretive sociological viewpoint. Section 5.2 sketches out one solution to this problem, using the concept of 'social possibilities' in a mediatory role; these arguments in turn lead to the formulation of a third conceptual theme for Part Three.

Both sections are written around key issues and the line of argument used for each issue follows the same pattern and logic, based upon the notion of possibilities. The methodological and theoretical strategies formulated in response to these issues form the foundations for the analysis of organisational politics in Part Three.

## 5.1 Methodology and Possibilities

### 5.1.1 The Problem of Theoretical Circularity

Few sociologists would dispute that the critical defining characteristic of their discipline *as a science* involves the relationship between theory and evidence and that the former, if it is to be 'scientific', must be responsive to the latter. In short, and to state the obvious, sociological explanations must say something about the subject matter to be explained. It appears to me that one of the major problems in current sociological theory is precisely its failure to relate to and allow for the possibilities of the social world, and this problem, examples of which we have already encountered, owes much to one prevailing style of academic theorising which Mills (1970) has dubbed "grand theory"<sup>1</sup>. Grand theory is typified by a preoccupation with high levels of abstraction, formal definitional treatises and the construction of typologies, and involves the

"... withdrawal into systematic work on conceptions [which] should be only a formal moment within the work of social science" (Mills, 1970, p.58).

It is especially important to be aware of the implications of such a withdrawal when one is writing a theoretical thesis.

Under the label of 'grand theory', Mills discusses the archetypal work of Talcott Parsons, but he represents only one 'wing' - albeit an extreme one - of a much broader *style* of theorising. Parsonian grand theory is at such a level of abstraction that it apparently has no pretensions of relating to the problems of empirical research. Such theorising creates a self-contained model of the world without resort to studying the latter. A second form of grand theorising is much more pervasive and yet, as I shall show, equally dangerous. This second form has empirical intentions and yet still tends to create a self-contained model of social reality. It would appear, and I shall elaborate immediately below, that despite intentions to implicate the empirical world in theorising, the latter activity remains relatively oblivious to its subject-matter, and to possible variations in the latter.

It will become clearer as this section unfolds that it is important to employ a methodological strategy which insists upon the theorist engaging with the real world, and that it is only by having a conception of a 'theory' as being open to empirical possibilities that the dilemma of grand theorising is avoidable. But what more exactly is this dilemma?

I would like to pose the aforementioned problem as one of "theoretical circularity" i.e. a theory becomes so highly defined and so internally complete that it constitutes a conceptual world of its own, independent of the empirical world it purports to describe and explain. A problem like this may arise whenever a researcher constructs a set of formal definitions and propositions about the social world without ongoing empirical reference to the latter. In Part One above, we have already encountered such formal (grand)

theorising from, for example, Simon, Etzioni, Cyert and March, and, to a lesser extent, from Clegg.

These theorists have constructed theoretical edifices which are internally stable and consistent to such a degree that they *cannot* be faulted except by pointing out the logical absurdities of, and weaknesses in, their conceptions of organisational life - in particular, of power and politics. Their theories work, not necessarily because they explain something in the world, but because the concepts are defined and the propositions are constructed such that they cannot *fail* to work. As soon as one accepts Etzioni's formal definition of 'involvement' or Simon's formal definition of 'authority' (as examples taken from the earlier discussion in Part One) - and according to their own methodology they have the right to define their concepts *ab initio* - one has also to accept the consequences of those concepts as they relate to others. The theory works *because of itself*; it is irremediably circular; it is closed to the possibilities of the very social world it intends to explain.

The self-contained theoretical worlds of Etzioni and Simon are illustrative (in the present context) and symptomatic of a style of theorising prescribed by the prevailing methodology in sociology (cf. Baldamus, 1976, p.103ff.). Theoretical circularity is a consequence of a set of rules governing theorising, but in order to appreciate more fully this problem, and so that an alternative may be constructed, it is necessary to examine a number of methodological points regarding 'open' and 'closed' theories. The alternative methodology - called, after Blumer (1970a, 1970b), a "sensitising" methodology - which I shall be advocating is one which encourages theoretical openness and does not emphasise the formal definitions and abstract conceptualisation that typify grand theory and lead to a theoretical circularity which isolates the scientific activity of theorising from its subject-matter. In the next two sub-sections I shall be going back to first principles to illustrate that the sensitising methodology proposed not only provides for a happier relationship between the theoretical and empirical aspects of sociology but also abides by accepted philosophical argument.

### 5.1.2 The Conjectural Nature of Knowledge

Before investigating the role of theory, its concepts and propositions, especially regarding a theoretical thesis which intends to be part of *scientific* endeavour, it is necessary to know exactly what can be expected of 'theory'; i.e. given an adequate relationship to the real world (the nature of this relationship is examined below), what sort of 'knowledge' can 'theory' provide for us? This brief discussion of the scope of (social) scientific theory is not intended to demonstrate any profound philosophical points, but simply to establish an epistemological starting point for sociological methodology.

The ideal of the scientific community has long been the construction of propositions of a 'law-like' character which reflect or represent 'objective reality' by identifying an 'existing' pattern of causation. This one-to-one relationship between scientific images of reality in the form of empirically or experientially validated causal laws and the reality itself reveals an "empiricist" epistemology that proposes that absolute or perfect knowledge is possible by adhering to strict, scientifically-defined criteria of observing reality and "putting that reality on paper" (so to speak). This form of empiricism, which finds its sociological equivalent in positivist methodology, is based upon what Popper (1969, p.5ff.) calls an "optimistic epistemology". At the heart of this epistemology, traceable to Bacon and Descartes, is the doctrine that "truth is manifest" (ibid) i.e. that truth or knowledge is clearly available to those who will see.

However, the ultimate source of knowledge cannot be simply located in the reality it purports to know, because 'what we know' is the only indicator of that reality and cannot be allowed to validate itself. Our theories and propositions are not grounded in unambiguous observation of "facts", but in the traditions which we adopt (cf. Clegg, 1975, p.10ff.), and in our past experiences of reality, both of which furnish us with a certain ability to *guess* about how the world works. Our propositions are not inductively

produced inevitably reflecting the 'reality' observed, but are always and unavoidably built upon conjectures (Popper, 1969) which acquire greater status as 'knowledge' as they stand up to criticism. Knowledge is therefore never absolute, but always conjectural, subject to revision, amendment and correction as observations (empirical and theoretical) render necessary.

Empiricism would not be so offended by this notion of conjectural knowledge if the propositions could ultimately acquire the status of the "laws" in the optimistic epistemology. Popper's classic analyses of the status of universal laws make it quite clear however that propositions (conjectures) are never verifiable in a strong sense. This leaves scientific knowledge in a limbo of uncertainty, progress in science not being possible in the way advocated by positivists - viz. of continually building up and adding to a system of verified universal laws - but only by refutation, criticism and the ongoing revisability of (conjectural) 'knowledge'.

If knowledge can only be conjectural, and thus theories are inevitably amendable, the purposes of science are furthered by ensuring that theory is "open" and subjectable to empirical possibilities.

"A theory which is not refutable by any conceivable event is non-scientific. Irrefutability is not a virtue of a theory (as people often think) but is a vice". (Popper, 1969, p.36).

The problem of theoretical circularity occurs precisely because of the effort that social scientists expend in making their conceptual structures "watertight". The construction of "open" theories requires refutable propositions, amendable concepts and a channel whereby discourse with the 'real world' is possible.

If scientific knowledge is conjectural, and if 'objective' truth is unavailable as an absolute, the major task of *a priori* theorising takes on a character which is essentially different from

the prevailing view in the 'grand theory' style. Social theorists have devoted much time and energy on the construction of large self-contained theoretical and conceptual edifices which defy refutation and amendment. Their methodology presumes that theories may be constructed according to the rule that the truth can be reflected unambiguously in relationships between concepts and propositions. Following from this rule, the aim of *a priori* theorising is to ponder upon problems of conceptualisation, working, in the end, to a formal definition of some part of reality - the definition thus concretising a formal concept.

Of course, concepts *are* a crucial part of the scientific effort, but a danger lies in the process of abstract conceptual discussions which formalise and concretise concepts within formal theoretical frameworks. Concepts and propositions *can only be* (revisable) conjectures about reality, but a number of factors in this style of theorising collude to objectify such conjectures into a framework impervious to empirical testing. First, as has already been mentioned, conceptualisation always takes place within a theoretical tradition, the rationales of which colour all concepts in a common hue. In addition to such general themes with which concepts are underlain, there exists a formal, deliberate interdependence created by the theorist himself as he seeks internal consistency of meaning. Resulting from these factors, each concept becomes "impregnated" with other concepts leading to a theoretical unity which has been achieved independently of empirical reference.<sup>2</sup> In its extreme, such a comprehensive unity becomes a theoretical circularity which, because of its closed character, cannot be broken.

If *a priori* theorising (and theory-construction in general) is to abide by the limits imposed by the conjectural nature of knowledge, empirical concepts and propositions must be corrigible. This requires a different view of sociological concepts from that described above. Just as I have argued above that the alternative methodology which is needed to resolve the problem of theoretical circularity is based upon a more realistic philosophical view of the possibilities of knowledge derived from Popper's analysis, so too is

the alternative notion of a sociological concept bound up with general arguments concerning the scope and function of concepts in general and particularly in social science.

### 5.1.3 The "Open-Texture" of Empirical Concepts

The rationale behind the 'grand theory' style of academic theorising is that it is possible to develop concepts by abstract discussion and clarification leading to an *end-product* - the formal definition. The problem, as we have seen, is precisely that this style of theorising forecloses on what exists or may exist by tying such end-products into a logical circle. Clearly if theorising is to be open to empirical possibilities, concepts themselves must be sensitive to reality. That concepts should be continually subject to revision, amendment or elaboration should not surprise us - first, this is demanded by the fact that scientific knowledge is conjectural; second, such is itself a feature of scientific/empirical concepts. The latter line of argument has been suggested by Waismann (1960).

An empirical concept is one which is created in order to reference or describe some cluster of sense-data, and may be distinguished from non-empirical or purely logical concepts (e.g. the notion of 'function' in mathematics). Although positivists, with their optimistic epistemology, argue that verification of a concept resides in the identification of the sense-data that entail that concept, it has been suggested above that much sociological theorising in the 'grand theory' style either fails to introduce such empirical testing, or only entertains 'confirming' instances, thereby reducing intendedly empirical concepts to a purely logical status i.e. their meaning is derived internally in terms of their relations with other concepts and of the tradition in which theorising is located. Waismann argues that empirical concepts should *not* be regarded as end-results at any stage of the scientific process because almost invariably they possess an "open texture" (Waismann, 1960, p.119). This proposition complements and extends the Popperian line of argument concerning the impossibility of scientific

verifiability :

"The fact that in many cases there is no such thing as a conclusive verification is connected with the fact that most of our empirical concepts are not delimited in all possible directions" (Waismann, 1960, pp.119-120).

This assertion applies not only to intendedly empirical concepts developed on a theoretical plane - as in the 'grand theory' style - but also to those empirical concepts inducted from sense-data. Even notions which have been apparently defined with the absolute degree of precision (Waismann cites 'gold' as an example) are essentially open-textured :

"... we can never exclude altogether the possibility of some unforeseen situations arising in which we shall have to modify our definition" (ibid.).

To behave otherwise would leave to a scientific authoritarianism, since theory would exceed its authority to describe or explain the world (cf. Mills, 1970, p.49) through a faulty epistemology.<sup>3</sup>

'Open-texture' should not be confused with 'vagueness' (see 5.1.4), since the latter, in Waismann's sense (1960, p.120), may be remedied by greater precision or accuracy in rules for identification. 'Open-texture' is a "fundamental" characteristic of most empirical concepts and simply has to be lived with. Intendedly empirical concepts must not be treated as if they were closed end-products, because generally (perhaps always in social science) they possess an open texture.

"An alternative way of stating this would be to say that definitions of open terms are *always* corrigible or emendable". (Waismann, 1960, p.120; emphasis in original).

Given that open texture is an inescapable quality of empirical sociological concepts<sup>4</sup>, we return to the need for a methodological strategy that recognises them for what they are, and that allocates to them a theoretical role which they are logically capable of fulfilling. If empirical concepts *are* open-textured, *a priori* theorising should not deprive them of the possibility of being "corrected" or "emended" by future events.

#### 5.1.4 The 'Vagueness' of Sociological Concepts

While Waismann suggests that empirical concepts are open-textured, Blumer (1970a) argues that social scientific concepts in particular are unavoidably vague or ambiguous.<sup>5</sup> This in itself is barely surprising, since the 'open-texture' of concepts creates the possibility of vagueness (Waismann, 1960, 120) because the greater the number of possible lines of conceptual extension that remain unextended, the more likely is that concept to appear ambiguous or maldefined. Furthermore, Waismann bases the importance of his notion of open-texture upon the *contingent* nature of reality, and, since social reality is arguably "more contingent" than 'natural' reality because of the intervening interpretive activities of social actors (cf. Clarke, 1975, pp.173ff; Giddens, 1976, p.75; and 5.2 below), one would expect sociological concepts to be especially prone to ambiguity. Blumer argues that :

"Careful scrutinising of our [social scientific] concepts forces one to recognise that they rest on vague sense and not on precise specification of attributes" (Blumer, 1970a, p.54).

Blumer continues by suggesting - in a similar vein to that above - that much of the present malaise with social theory is that it assumes, wrongly, that concepts can be precisely specified, and that formal definitions can thus be attained.

Since ambiguity is an inevitable quality of sociological concepts, we require a strategy to cope as best as we can with this

unfortunate fact of social theory. Blumer thus rejects the positivistic strategy that treats concepts as "definitive".

"A definitive concept refers precisely to what is common to a class of objects by the aid of a clear definition in terms of attributes or fixed bench marks" (Blumer, 1970a, p.57).

The possession of such a concept allegedly permits the identification of all instances referenced by the concept by matching the attributes observed with those delineated in the definition. I have already commented that ambiguity and vagueness are features of our social world, since empirical instances of a concept rarely if ever are identical in all definable attributes. Given this fact, it makes little sense to start from a closely-defined concept and limit our attention to only those instances which share the defined attributes or ignore *other* attributes which an instance may possess *because* they do not conform to our definitive concept. To do so would be to present the social world as it is not - or more seriously to magic its "significant" characteristics *into* existence through our theorising. Either way results in a scientific authoritarianism (as indicated above), since reality is described or explained (in a sense, scientifically constituted and reified) by theoretical fiat rather than by reference to reality itself.

Once again, we are forced to a position where it becomes necessary to build into our methodology those epistemological and methodological factors that have been discussed. Closed theory and definitive concepts are not congruent with the conjectural nature of knowledge and the open-texture and 'vagueness' of sociological concepts; *a priori* theorising needs to proceed along different lines.

#### 5.1.5 A Sensitising Methodology

In order to build a theory which is open to the possibilities of social reality we need a methodology which makes theory *sensitive*

to variation and change in the latter. Following Blumer (1970a) our concepts need to be "sensitising" to the social world rather than "definitive" of it :

"A sensitising concept lacks such specification of attributes or bench marks [possessed by definitive concepts] and consequently it does not enable the user to move directly to the instance and its relevant content. Instead it gives the user a general scope of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances" (Blumer, 1970a, pp.57-58).

In other words, if the arguments so far are correct, a sensitising concept merely does what an empirical concept is *capable of doing*. Of course, a definitive concept guides one's attention to certain aspects of the real world; its inadequacy lies in its inflexibility and insensitiveness to those aspects of empirical instances which do not form part of the definition. A sensitising concept is utilised with a different set of theoretical expectations viz. that it is *likely* to need amendment or extension in the face of that to which it refers. Such concepts presuppose their own revisability and corrigibility, and this leads to a completely different relationship between academic theorising and empirical research. To the extent that the 'grand theory' style involves empirical research at all - and this of course raises new problems regarding the purpose of theoretical sociology - the use of definitive concepts tends to set up theoretical circularity in which the conceptual structure necessarily incorporates successfully all the evidence it invokes. Theory guided by sensitising methodology, on the other hand, is responsive to evidence - disconfirming as well as confirming - and this not only conforms to the epistemological and methodological arguments set out above, but also does justice to the uniqueness, ambiguity and contingency which prevail in the social world. Blumer summarises this point

"One moves out from the concept to the concrete distinctiveness of the instance instead of embracing the instance in the abstract framework of the concept" (Blumer, 1970a, p.59).

So sensitising concepts guide the theorist's attention to aspects of social reality and are sensitive to the latter in that they possess a revisable character.

Just as sociological concepts perform a sensitising function, so too do theoretical propositions. Generalisations in sociology which attempt to relate different characteristics of the social world by proposing some causal connection cannot be regarded as "laws" or "law-like" in the sense that 'epistemological optimists' would have us believe. This is true of the natural sciences, given the general arguments concerning the conjectural nature of scientific knowledge, but, as Clarke (1975) argues, sociological propositions cannot be regarded as law-like because of the postulate of voluntarism :

"[The general] facts about social life ... are that human beings are the only moving agents in history ... and that what human beings do depends upon how they interpret the world around them, and not upon universally operative law-like principles... The assumption of human voluntarism implies that relationships between structural properties are contingent. The effects of any one property, including the other properties to which it leads, will depend on how the former is perceived, which aspects of it are relevant to those whom it confronts, and so on." (Clarke, 1975, pp.173-1974; cf. Giddens, 1976, p.102).

The 'facts' about the scope of human knowledge and about the nature of human social life means that propositions about the empirical social world or

"... so-called social laws can have only a sensitising function in the process of sociological explanation" (ibid.).

As with sociological concepts, theoretical propositions function to suggest lines of argument or, more specifically, *where* in the social world to find explanations of the empirical cases under scrutiny.

What does this mean for the nature of theory in sociological methodology? The arguments above have suggested the inadequacies of 'grand theory' with its large conceptual structures and resulting theoretical circularity. The necessary alternative, and one which is congruent with the arguments detailed above, is an open or "emergent" theory. Using concepts and propositions as sensitising agents which are themselves responsive or adaptive to the empirical reality they point to, academic theorising enters into a close and continuous relationship with the social world and does not attempt to legislate for or rule the world it attempts to describe and explain. As propositions and concepts come into contact with empirical instances, the latter reshape and revise the former. Theory becomes continually reformulated to account for new or different experiences, and, over time, gradually "emerges"; it can never become a body of absolute laws for Popperian reasons and because of the essentially contingent nature of the social world.

Sensitising methodology involves a "pragmatic" view of academic theorising, since it defines the flexible relationship of concepts and propositions to the empirical world. 'Knowledge' is hence dependent upon this close, adjustive relationship of theorising and evidence. Huber, (1973), in noting the relationship between sensitising methodology and philosophical pragmatism, completely misunderstands the significance of this insight. She confuses the possession and use of concepts as sensitising agents as indicating a "lack of prior theoretical formulation" (Huber, 1973, p.281), subsequently criticising the methods on the following grounds :

"... the prior construction of logically-related propositions is important in science because it gives the researcher a chance to lose the game" (Huber, 1973, p.282).

Huber finds the flexibility of emergent theory worrying because it cannot be rejected *in toto* i.e. because it adapts to reality. We have, however, already seen that a sensitising methodology does involve *a priori* theorising, conceptualising and proposition-formulation - it simply does not treat them as end-results. She misses the major point in her claim that only definitive concepts and law-like propositions can lead to refutation, because the kind of *a priori* theoretical formulations of which she apparently approves, *does* court the ever-present danger of theoretical circularity; and the examples of this approach encountered in Part One have been seen to lead to a theoretical absolutism which does not adequately reflect the epistemological, methodological or sociological injunctions discussed.<sup>6</sup>

Pragmatism in sociological methodology appears to abide by those injunctions, and suggests a notion of *a priori* theorising which enjoys a scientifically healthier relationship with its subject-matter. If concepts or propositions are useful and accurate in understanding the "concrete distinctiveness" and "contingency" which characterises social life, then they remain intact; if they fail in their task, they must be revised or amended. Pragmatism offers a chance to develop "open theory" so that 'knowledge' is shaped by what exists or happens, not solely by what we think (or like to think) exists or happens. Herein lies the promise of a sensitising methodology which, after all, merely reflects what theory, concepts and propositions are capable of doing and being.

## 5.2 Interpretive Sociology and the Analysis of Social Possibilities

### 5.2.1 The Problem of Constraint

My aim in this chapter has been to prepare the methodological and theoretical ground in which to cultivate ideas and propositions

concerning the specific topic of this thesis - that of organisational power and politics. The methodological work has been completed, and it remains to consider some major theoretical problems, and their solutions, before applying the resulting ideas in the chapters that follow.

In 5.1 above, I advocated a sensitising methodology which is cognisant of the philosophical scope of social science and which maintains the empirical possibilities of the subject matter. The notions of theory, concept and proposition which constitute the sensitising methodology may be seen as describing, prescribing and circumscribing the appropriate behaviour of the social scientist at work. It builds upon the view of sociology as the *interpretive* activities of a special kind of human being who attempts to create a disciplined study of his fellow participants in the social world. It would be a strange sociological theory that overlooks the fact that sociologists are themselves social actors performing specific types of action, so if sociologists are "active interpreters" (Atkinson, 1972, p.270) of their social world<sup>7</sup> - a proposition which underlies the sensitising methodology - it is only consistent to conceive of everyday social action in the same terms.

The positivist methodology, best represented by the conventional structuralist approach in sociology, also prescribes and purportedly describes the activities of the social scientist. I have argued that this methodology is based upon false philosophical premises, since the scientific ideals it recommends are first not pursued in scientific practice, and second *not possible* to achieve. However, this methodology does lead to a consistent structuralist theory of social action, albeit inadequate by the criteria used here. The social scientist is seen as neutrally reporting the "facts" as they manifest themselves to him (or anyone else), and explains them by neutral techniques (e.g. statistical) which leave the "facts" intact and unblemished. He is thus normatively constrained by the scientific ethos, and practically constrained by the "facts" as they present themselves to him. The social possibilities of scientific

action are duly extremely limited. The structuralists' explanation of the everyday social world, as is now well-documented, leans heavily upon the same causal notion of constraint, this time attributed to structural properties, which renders an account of the interpretive activities of social actors unnecessary.

While the positivist methodology and the structuralist mode social 'explanation' are inadequate because they contravene the initial premises of my position, their contrast with the sensitising methodology and the interpretive mode of explanation does highlight a very important issue which requires theoretical attention before I can return to the topic of organisational power and politics in Part Three.

In considering their respective methodological positions or their assumptions about the 'facts' of social action, it transpires that the positivist/structuralist viewpoint implies determinism and constraint as opposed to the sensitising/interpretive approach which involves contingency and voluntarism. The methodological implications of determinism *versus* contingency occupied us in 5.1, but the theoretical issue of constraint *versus* voluntarism demands discussion and resolution, as suggested in Chapter One.

A multitude of sociologists have explicitly constructed their respective theses upon the structuralist/interpretive or system/action distinction (e.g. Goldstein, 1963; Cohen, 1968; Silverman, 1970; Atkinson, 1972; Corrigan, 1975; Clarke, 1975; Giddens, 1976; and notably Dawe, 1970), and ideal types of sociological approach have been drawn up as though they were battle-lines. The issue that is commonly cited as the crucial one is whether man is externally constrained to behave as he does, or whether he chooses his own fate. Dawe summarises the distinction :

"There are, then, two sociologies: a sociology of social system and a sociology of social action... They posit antithetical views of human nature, of

society and of the relationship between the social and the individual. The first asserts the paramount necessity, for societal and individual well-being, of external constraint; hence the notion of a social system ontologically and methodologically prior to its participants. The key notion of the second is that of autonomous man ... Society thus is the creation of its members; the product of their construction of meaning..." (Dawe, 1970, p.214).

In short, it is a debate between a postulate of external constraint (determinism) and one of voluntarism (contingency), and it is usually presented as a mutually-exclusive choice of sociological strategy. The constraint/voluntarism debate merges into the much broader question concerning the objective and subjective dimension of social reality, so that structuralist proponents of constraint have become dubbed as "objectivist", whereas interpretive approaches based upon the postulate of voluntarism receive the somewhat lesser ("scientific") status by being called "subjectivist". In fact, as I shall demonstrate later, the extension of the constraint vs voluntarism debate into the objective-subjective one is not only unhelpful but also invalid (see 5.2.3 below).

The constraint/voluntarism dichotomy has been subjected to a number of extensive treatises to demonstrate their compatibility or incompatibility (e.g. Parsons, 1965 (originally, 1937) 1951; Berger and Luckmann, 1971; Atkinson, 1972). Although they have met with differing degrees of success in reconciling these two postulates concerning the nature of social life, a large number of sociologists would agree with Rex (1974) :

"We are faced with a ... complex subject matter which involves a dialectical interplay between human striving and social constraint. We need to do justice, that is to say, both to phenomenal and noumenal man" (Rex, 1974, p.4).

For reasons explored in Chapter One, the postulate of voluntarism, as the primary premise of this thesis, is sacrosanct; yet no theory of power and politics can merit serious attention unless it entertains a strong concept of constraint. For my purposes, an organisation is a social arena in which courses of action are socially enabled or socially constrained by one's own or others' actions; politics constitute an important aspect of this process. Given the postulate of voluntarism, whereby sociological explanation can only be achieved through the analysis of the subjective meaningfulness of human behaviour, we are confronted with a genuine theoretical problem, viz. how to introduce a notion of constraint without surrendering the postulate of voluntarism.

One strategy for resolving this problem appears to emerge from the analysis of social action in terms of social possibilities. If it can be shown that the notion of constraint can be incorporated into a consistent interpretive sociology, and if the relationship between the objective and the subjective aspects of social life can be adequately articulated by using the same line of approach - viz. that of reformulating theoretical premises using the notion of social possibilities - the stage will indeed be set for Part Three.

#### 5.2.2. Social Possibilities, Voluntarism and Constraint

The social world is the creation of its human participants, as they interact meaningfully together. Because of the voluntarism that characterises social action, any sociological theory is necessary contingent, adjusting to the concrete exigencies that it meets in its probing of social life. *Methodologically* this means that theory should not deprive the world of its *empirical* possibilities by fiat; *theoretically*, this means that the social world should be examined in terms of the *social* possibilities for action, as perceived by the participants themselves. It is this latter point that needs clarification at this stage.

Interpretive sociology is based upon the proposition that social explanation must include reference to the way actors make

sense of their situations and subsequently choose the courses of action which the researcher observes. The primary task of such a sociological approach is therefore to acquire knowledge of the meaning-systems of the actors under scrutiny, for this permits the researcher to understand the aims and objectives of the participants and thereby to construct an explanation of how the latter confronted the question of choice between possible courses of action. The postulate of voluntarism thus underscores the need to explain choice behaviour, for it is only in the most simple cases (e.g. "the-money-or-your-life" kind) that no choice exists. Choice between possible courses of action depends upon a number of factors, including the actual possibilities that exist and the possibilities as perceived by the actor (to which I shall return in 5.2.3); it may be made on a number of grounds ranging from 'rational' evaluation of the different courses available/perceived - where 'rational' means 'rational-to-the-actor' - to the habitual response to a familiar situation.<sup>8</sup>

The process of social choice from the actor's perspective constitutes the classic problem for interpretive sociology, and may be analysed in terms of the selection of one course of social action from the more or less broad range of 'social possibilities'. However such an analysis of social action remains firmly entrenched in the subjectivist world of human choice. In analysing action in terms of choice between possible courses, this approach neglects one of the major experiences of man in social life - that of *not* being able to behave as one would prefer i.e. constraint. Furthermore, this naive subjectivist analysis considers actors' possibilities without reference to an objective social world which not only enables behaviour but may also be unyielding to human efforts to manipulate it. It has been the general line of critical argument from structuralists and Marxists that interpretive sociology has not or could not present an effective conception of social constraint<sup>9</sup>, and, as mentioned earlier, this criticism has certainly not been convincingly dealt with. The positivistic solutions to this problem have tended to re-assert directly or indirectly, a Durkheimian-type notion of external constraint<sup>10</sup>, but fortunately it is not necessary

to resort to determinative social structures in order to introduce a meaningful concept of constraint.

At its simplest, the notion of constraint may be explored in terms of social *impossibilities*, i.e. an actor is constrained when certain courses of action are perceived as being closed off to him. In a sense the postulate of voluntarism insists that actors "choose" their own fate, but in saying this it is clearly necessary to strip the notion of "choice" and the act of "choosing" of the political and moral connotations. It is true that an act of choice can be, and frequently is, paradoxically a self-imposed constraint, as in the situation where a course of action, once selected, immediately limits one's future choices. Such decisions are indeed "fateful", but, more often, the process of choice incorporates the conscious or unconscious examination of both what is possible *and what is not*. It is an important point to note that just as the positive act of choosing between alternatives may be based upon 'rational' grounds or may occur as a habit, at some stage prior to this act certain courses of action will have been rejected as "impossible-given-the-circumstances", and such rejection may occur through a 'rational' process or may be habitual i.e. they simply do not register as worthy of consideration. This last matter, wherein the limits of one's own actions become taken-for-granted, is one significant aspect of the politics of order or of consensus, reflecting the second face of power or Lukes' third dimension (1974).<sup>11</sup>

However, to take the logic of this exposition further, social possibilities and impossibilities are not the creation of an actor's mind - even though their role as explanatory sociological factors must remain on the subjective level - but derive from the actor's experiences and awareness of the "real world outside".

### 5.2.3 Subjective and Objective Possibilities

Opportunities and constraints are part of the everyday knowledge of 'how the world works' that social actors bring with

them to social situations in which they participate. They are part of the meaning systems or "interpretive schemes" which constitute the "theories" that social actors employ in order to categorise, explain and predict the social world and its reactions to their efforts. I have noted the general failure to arrive at an adequate solution to the problem of constraint, but the approach advocated here does permit an alternative theoretical strategy to integrate both constraint and choice *and* the objective and subjective dimensions. This strategy involves a systematic study<sup>12</sup> of the 'external' origins and logic of the everyday theorising that is the immediate 'causal' factor in social action. Only in this way is it possible to carry through the promise of the interpretive approach without, first, undermining the latter's philosophical foundations, or, second, withdrawing from the "concretely existing world" (cf. Hindess, 1972, p.16ff.).<sup>13</sup>

In order to understand the source of the social possibilities and impossibilities that respectively enable or constrain participants' actions, it is necessary to examine the "everyday theories" which the latter employ, and their role in linking the subjective realm of consciousness with the objective "real" world. It is no accident that this line of enquiry in part leads back to the 'pragmatism' encountered in 5.1.

The source of the range of possible courses of action open to and perceived by social actors clearly and indisputably resides in the real social situations, past and present, which have been experienced. Not all experiences in their full vivacity and ramifications are retained, and Schutz speaks of 'sedimentation' to refer to the process whereby the significance or relevance of some rather than other historical experiences, of some aspects of an experience rather than other aspects, becomes part of the available and usable stock of knowledge for the actor(s) in question (cf. Schutz, 1972, p.75ff.). This process of sedimentation, whereby the 'objective' world enters, so to speak, the subjective consciousness of social actors does not occur randomly, but in a patterned way.

At any given moment in history, an actor will have at his disposal, 'sedimented' from his experiences in social life, a set of 'concepts' and 'propositions' which inform him about how future situations are likely to react to his actions as he pursues his objectives. Such a 'theory' (or, more realistically, a 'set of theories') will help him to recognise situations, categorise them and plan appropriate courses of action. It will, in my language, inform him of his social possibilities, and his social impossibilities - although much of this 'guidance' will be implicit, resulting in (habitual) choices which previous experiences rendered realistic, practical and not worthy of rethinking.

In order to understand how the 'objective' world relates to 'subjective' experience, and consequently with social action, it is important to realise how such 'theories' articulate with social reality. People do not usually continue to act in accordance with the prescriptions of their 'theories' if present social situations do not 'react' as expected, or if they encounter new, unfamiliar situations which cannot be expected to follow known patterns. Neither is the social world experienced as possessing such an orderly state that something new or unexpected leads to a "nightmare" of anomic uncertainty, as one might think from the Durkheimian tradition of theorising.<sup>14</sup>

Actors do not possess unchanging sets of normative expectations or systems of typifications designed by society in its institutional wisdom. 'Theories', as I have called them, derive from actors' past experiences of society, just as the social scientists' theories are based on traditions and experiences; but just as the latter are revisable in the light of new experiences, so too with the former.<sup>15</sup>

"The distinction between application of categories and theories and their modification is crucial if we wish to explain why people come to interpret the world as they do. Only by locating the point

of origin of concepts and beliefs can we locate the theoretical or practical problems which [an] innovation was required to remove and which, in conjunction with the then existing experience and knowledge of the person concerned, forms the basis of the explanation. The key to such an explanation, put very briefly, is the plausibility of the new concepts and ideas to the innovator as a way of dealing with a problematic situation." (Clarke, 1975, p.108).

In many aspects of their everyday life, social actors are necessarily pragmatic.<sup>16</sup> Sets of expectations do not endure in the moral certainty and with the universal applicability that Parsons presumes, because actors' everyday theories do not work all the time. As long as they do work people will tend to muddle through unproblematically, leading to the habitualisation of actions. As they continue to work, people may even forget the original theories underlying their behaviour. If they fail to work, the blame may initially be located in the situation itself rather than theory, as with McHugh's (1968) student respondents. In time, however, it will become clear that the theory is no longer plausible, and 'theories', 'concepts' and 'propositions' require some attention - amendment, extension, revision etc. The parallel with a sensitising methodology is complete.

The logic of this discussion now needs to be redrafted in terms of the concept of possibilities in order to conclude this argument. The social world is both enabling and constraining in the sense that social actors, through experiences of 'living', become aware of what they have done, might have done, could not do, or did do but regretted for various reasons. Objective or "structural" possibilities and impossibilities become incorporated in varying degrees of 'accuracy', in their everyday theories of social life, which then sensitise their users to the nature of the next situation confronted. Actors may either overestimate the possibilities/

impossibilities or underestimate them - i.e. the present social situation may be more or less unyielding than their theory predicts. In such circumstances, everyday theorising may become adjusted if the actor behaves such as to become aware of the difference, or not if the behaviour exhibited produces no such awareness. Informed by more experience, confirming or adjusting the theory in question, the pragmatic actor enters new situations with an appraisal of his perceived social possibilities and impossibilities.

The relationship between the 'objective' structural network of possibilities/constraints and the perceived social set of possibilities/impossibilities is thus dynamic and cannot be expected to be one-to-one. This type of approach has a number of theoretically significant implications: first, since an actor's behaviour in a situation depends upon 'theories' constructed and tested in previous situations, it has an inevitable historical dimension; second, it warns against the oversimple association of constraint with 'objective' reality. It is precisely this latter tendency - derived from the Durkheimian tradition - that has created the difficulties encountered in reconciliation of the postulates of voluntarism and constraint.

#### 5.2.4 Constraint, Structure and Power

In the above theoretical construction, the objective social world impinges upon a person's behaviour by entering into the subjective process by which he shapes the course of action to pursue. This occurs through a historical formulation of everyday theories which inform him of his social possibilities and impossibilities<sup>17</sup> - on the practical assumption that the present situation will conform to past experiences of similar situations - and by the contemporary success or failure of his selected course of action, the latter experience subsequently adding to his stock of knowledge with an appropriate extension or revision of his present theories. Through this dynamic relationship between the subjective and objective dimensions, the notion social constraint - or the social barriers to freedom of choice - is assimilated to the postulate of voluntarism.

This view presupposes that the constraints on human freedom originate in the world that exists independently of the particular person or group whose actions are being examined. This objective world therefore presents opportunities and barriers which over a period of time tend to become more or less known to its participants via the interactive process described. Far from leading away from an analysis of the objective world, this interpretive approach requires its investigation in order to account for the range of social possibilities and impossibilities of the actors in question. In theorising organisational power and politics, this need to understand the scope of choice offered implies that a concept of 'social structure' - or rather a concept with a similar point of reference - becomes highly pertinent.

The social world in which actions take place and which they collectively (re)create, is not a vacuum nor a randomly distributed set of relationships with equal weight. Conflicting goals, unforeseen consequences of action etc. militate against the smoothly-working, neatly-integrated social system, but the concretely-existing social world does present its participants and creators with a structure of sorts. This world 'possesses' a structure or network of possibilities and impossibilities which may to a greater or lesser extent resemble the actor's understanding of his potential courses of action. *This 'structure' is not determinative of social actions*, but may be considered as a framework within which social life is enacted. It is not reflected one-to-one in actors' definitions of the world of possibilities, and the same structure<sup>18</sup> will present some actors with possible courses of action denied to other actors. This new concept of 'structure' as a network of objective opportunities and constraints, is an essential ingredient in sociological analysis, and will require further detailed attention in Chapter Seven.

One further matter remains before this chapter ends, and the outline of an approach to the topic of organisational politics begins : how does 'power' fit into this reformulation of an interpretive approach? The criticism of interpretive sociology that it remains on the level of subjective consciousness, is "free-floating"

or devoid of social constraint, carries with it the corollary - noted more by Marxist theorists than conventional structuralists - that it can say nothing about power and politics.<sup>19</sup> However, once the interpretive approach takes into account the constraint factor, it can by simple extension examine the role of power in social life, because power is one of the foremost types of social constraint. The easiest and most convenient distinction relates to the intentionality of the constraints imposed on social actors.

Constraints may be intentionally or unintentionally imposed by third parties, and, as a sensitising notion, power may usefully be viewed as actions meaningfully deployed by one actor (or group) to restrict (increase) the range of possibilities (impossibilities) of a second actor or group of actors. Such power actions may be sanctioned or prescribed by the rules and regulations in force in the social arena being investigated, thus being describable as acts of 'institutional authority'; or they may be perceived as socially legitimate, hence describable as acts of 'normative authority' (see Chapter One). Whatever the label used to describe a particular act whereby constraint is deliberately applied, this sensitising notion of 'power' involves essentially social acts.

Other constraints may be applied to an actor without the conscious, meaningful actions of a second person. This may occur through two general factors: first, there are social factors or mechanisms in the social world which effectively delimit the social possibilities of actors independent of the deliberate willing of individuals in the social situation in question. Rules and regulations are a notable example of this in the formal organisational context (cf. Gouldner's now classic analysis of rules, 1954). Such mechanisms, as with any social factor, are of course the creation of historic social actors, and are sustained by contemporary ones, so that their constraining role is at times difficult to distinguish from intentional political actions - in the case of institutional authority, indeed, power becomes the social application of rules etc. My purpose, however, is not to enter into a prolonged conceptual monologue that Mills (1970) would call the

"fetishing of concepts", for this would short-circuit the sensitising function of concepts. My effective conception of power and politics depends as much on the rest of my framework which is the subject of Part Three.

The second main type of social constraint not imposed through the intentional actions of social actors relates to a very important phenomenon which has been too much neglected in this short chapter, viz. the unintended consequences of social actions.<sup>20</sup>

"The intentional activity of individuals and classes creates the intended and unintended consequences which escalate, so affecting existing situations on which new meanings are imposed" (Atkinson, 1972, p.264).

I have already suggested that actors inevitably constrain themselves by choosing courses of action which necessarily exclude future possibilities, but I am specifically interested here in the unintended consequences of social *interactions en masse*. The pursuit of divergent goals or the acting-out of conflicting intentions create situational exigencies which few or none of the participants intend, but nevertheless shape the structural possibilities and impossibilities in future social situations.

The interpretive sociological analysis of politics does not concern itself solely with acts of power, because the latter are "only" (nevertheless important) what Clegg (1975) would call surface displays of the 'power' or the political phenomenon. To comprehend such displays it is important to know the 'objective' structure of possibilities within which historical and contemporary framework, intentional activities become manifest. Knowledge of this structure, including the 'non-intentional' constraints which are patterned and differentially applied - so that rules are not in general unrealistic, impartial mechanisms, but favour one party's interests over another's - help the sociologist to identify the mobilisation of bias in the social arena, and consequently belong without question to the political realm.

In this chapter I have performed some of the groundwork necessary for Part Three. Starting from the principle that the social world is a contingent rather than a determinative set of relationships, about which it is only possible to obtain conjectural knowledge, I have discussed the methodological and theoretical implications for an interpretive sociology. Above all, I have argued for a sensitising methodology that safeguards the empirical possibilities of social reality, and a theory of social possibilities which enables an interpretive sociology to entertain a strong concept of constraint. Before moving to Part Three and the consideration of this approach to the topic of organisational power and politics, I shall present in Chapter Six a summary of the analysis to date, and prepare the conceptual themes that have emerged for theoretical exploration.

NOTES

1. A second "style" of sociology, which Mills calls "abstracted empiricism", equally violates the relationship between theory and its subject matter by an immersion in "facts" and a neglect of theory. For reasons already explained, my interests lie in the "grand theory" style.
2. In Chapter One and throughout Part One, I have distinguished 'concept' from 'effective conception' in order to take account of this process whereby concepts take on meaning beyond their formal definitions because of their relationship with other concepts and with the prevailing theoretical tradition.
3. Popper (1969, pp.8-9 and elsewhere) describes one of the dangers of the optimistic epistemology as "epistemological authoritarianism", because its pronouncements on knowledge (and on the possibilities of knowledge) exceed the authority it possesses to rule on 'truth-value'. This happens because of the faulty doctrine that "truth is manifest".
4. This proposition is specifically argued below.
5. In a somewhat different context, Baldamus (1976, p.18ff.) speaks of the 'vagueness' of sociological vocabularies. The term 'vagueness' itself is probably unfortunate, since it carries connotations of purposeful lack of precision, which are patently not part of Blumer's arguments.
6. Huber also argues critically

"... That the SI [symbolic interaction] tradition shares with the philosophy of pragmatism, from which it originates, an epistemology which makes it reflect the social biases of the researcher and of the people whose behaviour is observed". (Huber, 1973, p.275).

It is only a scientific positivist who could possibly have said this! The 'critical' content of this statement lies in the use of the word 'bias', otherwise it appears to be a fairly accurate statement of the type of knowledge of which a realistic (pragmatic?) sociology is capable. Given the postulate of voluntarism, sociological theory clearly must attempt to comprehend social life in terms of the "biases" of the social actors themselves. This is the essence of Giddens's conception of the "double hermeneutic" (Giddens, 1976, p.79). Given the inadequacy of the doctrine that 'truth is manifest' - a faulty epistemology that facts speak for themselves (Popper, 1969) - knowledge is indeed produced through the interpretive powers ('biases') of the researcher. Huber's

statement could only appear to be controversially critical to exponents of Popper's 'optimistic epistemology'.

7. See Mills' (1970, pp.215ff.) excellent appendix "On Intellectual Craftsmanship". Also Baldamus (1976, p.32ff.) on the "intuitive" methods of sociological theorising.
8. On rationality and habit in social action, compare Weber, 1964, p.115ff.; Rationality as a sociological and philosophical issue is far too complex to be tackled here. It has, of course, been subject to intense debate in recent years.
9. Although rather entangled in the subjective-objective dispute - in its theoretical, philosophical and methodological guise - the problem of constraint has received much recent attention, e.g. Dreitzel (1970), Bryant (1970), Hindess (1972), Fallding (1972), Bauman (1973a, 1973b), Gorman (1975), Best (1975), Turner (1977).
10. Parsons commenced from a "voluntaristic" theory of social action, and attempted to reconcile it with the constraining power of 'society' by proposing a mechanistic theory of socialisation. Berger and Luckmann (1971) also argue that the antithetical positions of Weber and Durkheim are reconcilable. Clarke (1975, Chapter 8) demonstrates the inadequacies of these two attempts.
11. Clegg (1975) might relate this taken-for-granted knowledge of one's social possibilities/impossibilities to one's "form of life".
12. Such a study is obviously beyond the scope of this thesis, although the remaining pages of this chapter provide a broad outline of it, and Part Three endeavours to illustrate it with respect to the topic of organisational power and politics.
13. Hindess (1972) criticises Schutz's social phenomenology (1972) on the grounds that subjective meanings in his approach remain a sociologically unexplicated factor :

"As far as the social world is concerned they [i.e. subjective meanings] are determining but not determined, in it but not of it in the way that all other things are" (Hindess, 1972, p.17).

As Clarke (1975, p.109) argues, this leads to a "mystical view of the genesis of such meanings". It is precisely such "mysticism" that has led to many of the sociological doubts about interpretive approaches.

14. Berger and Luckmann argue :

"On the level of meaning, the institutional order represents a shield against terror". (Berger and Luckmann, 1971, p.119).

The implication that the objective world of institutions provides protection against the alternative terrifying state of meaninglessness, shows distinct parallels with Parsons' world of a normative order to which actors willingly commit themselves through binding legitimation. In both neo-Durkheimian worlds, 'society' provides order and meaning for the social actor rather than the latter making sense of his experiences to produce order and meaning. Cf. Light's review (1969) of Berger and Luckmann.

15. Social actors do not all the time employ flexible, corrigible theories. Indeed, some everyday 'theories' (e.g. ideologies) are capable of accounting for all exigencies in a manner disconcertingly similar to the circularity of closed academic theories. See Chapter Eight.

16. Schutz proposed the thesis that actors, in their 'natural attitude' to the social world, are characterised by a 'pragmatic motive' (e.g. Schutz, 1970, p.102). While, as a general statement, this certainly oversimplifies the variable process of social interpretation, pragmatism constitutes an important mode of everyday theorising. See Chapter Eight.

17. To say that actors 'know' the real social world via their everyday theories is *not* to say that they accept what they 'know' as morally or politically right. All actors have an ultimate ability to act contrary to their theories - e.g. in some radical cause - but they must "face the facts" of the objective world, and they 'know' it!

Beynon (1973) provides a telling example of what I mean :

"... no matter how radical or well-intentioned the men who become leaders of trade unions are, their position within the union (and hence within capitalist society) creates severe problems for them if they try to put their intentions into practice ... The radical trade unionist fights by the rules of the system that he hardly approves of, within an organisation that is incapable of changing those rules". (Beynon, 1973, pp.299-300).

18. Tiryakian (1970) employs a concept of social structure which is similar in appearance :

"... [social phenomena] are actualisations or manifestations from an existential ground of possibilities, and it is this ground which we refer to as social structure". (Tiryakian, 1970, p.118).

18. (cont'd)

However, his aim is to renovate structural-functionalism by giving it a historical dimension, and thus moves from his concept of structure in the opposite direction to that followed herein.

19. Hindess (1972, p.23), for example, rightly concludes that there are no politics in a Schutzian world. Dreitzel (1970), responding to the phenomenology and ethnomethodology, also makes the point that :

"... the social world is not only structured by language but also by the modes and forces of material production and by the systems of domination".  
(Dreitzel, 1970, p.xvii).

20. The unintended consequences of social (political) action are not explicitly examined fully in Part Three either. As explained in Chapter One, the burden of the thesis is in understanding of politics as socially meaningful action, but, in Chapter Nine it is not possible to discuss political action and process without reference to 'unintentions'.

BRINGING FORWARD CONCEPTUAL THEMES FOR THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

Remembering the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches examined in Part One, and building upon the methodological and theoretical premises established in Chapter Five, it is possible to present a set of sensitising themes and propositions about the nature of political life in an organisational context. In this chapter, it seems appropriate to reconsider briefly the lines of argument presented in Part One, and to discuss the basic form of the conceptual themes which, emerging from the work so far, together provide the clues to future theoretical development.

6.1 Outline of the Three Approaches to Organisational Power

In concluding Part One, I suggested that the three politics-related approaches that had emerged within the organisational literature did not happen in an unrelated manner. Indeed the historical development of approaches to organisational power and politics had followed a similar pattern to that observable in the study of power and politics in other fields. In discussing and evaluating a number of relevant organisation theories, it was possible to discern three general *types of approach* - the 'unitary', the 'political-conflict' (pluralist) and the 'critical' - and some of the implications of the approaches were detailed. In this section, I shall draw these *types of approach* together in summary form for purposes of comparison. At all times it should be remembered that in carrying out this exercise, the particularities of each theory will be submerged in the general type. Each type of approach is assessed according to how it deals with certain major questions of (organisational) politics, e.g. 'power', order, conflict, possibility (opportunity) and impossibility (constraint).

The 'unitary' approach, under which label were included the authority theorists, Simon's decision-making theory and Etzioni's

compliance framework, projects the image of an organisation that has a formally defined order established through the operation and acceptance of rules and institutional authority. This focus upon (formal) organisational order leads to a subsequent neglect of conflict since power (= authority) is a hierarchically-distributed resource for achieving the organisation's goals or tasks, and the problems of lateral relationships are not considered. Conflict is thus neglected on the horizontal dimension and ruled out of court by an institutional/behavioural notion of authority and a theoretically-imposed state of consensus. In this static approach, order is unproblematic and more-or-less rationalised with reference to normative consent.

In contrast, although the political-conflict or pluralist approach to power and politics shares an ultimate orientation to organisational order, the latter is theorised in strictly conflict terms. Order is seen to result as a balance or equilibrium from the ongoing power-conflict interactions between horizontal groupings; this balance either is a natural/coalitional achievement or is achieved through the mediation of a neutral referee (e.g. general management). Although conflict is unavoidable - it is even undesirable to attempt to prevent it - it is also bounded because it always takes place within rules mutually-accepted by the parties. Power is essentially systemic, observable in conflict situations, wielded according to specific issues and derived from functional/structural sources.

In the critical approach advocated by Stewart Clegg, order is neither formally established nor accomplished by some form of coalitional behaviour. It is rather grounded in a deep-lying structure of power which permeates the way people think; for this reason I conceive Clegg as providing a hegemonic theory of organisational order. Since this structural bias is an all-pervasive influence, conflict only occurs at the surface over issues which are permitted and channelled by those (economic) principles that pattern power and politics in the (industrial) organisation. Being bounded

thus, conflict occurs only over issues of relative insignificance to the organisation's "form of life". The sociological essence of organisational 'power' turns on the nature of "domination" so that power and authority (as surface phenomena) become indistinguishable. This static, ahistorical depth model of power in organisations is founded upon a "pre-cognitive" consensus about the life-form of the organisation in its (capitalist) societal context.

Figure 6.1 below intends to characterise these three types of approach in general outline.

Figure 6.1

General Characteristics of Three Types of  
Approach to Organisational Power and Politics

	Unitary	Pluralist	Critical
Exponents	Simon, Etzioni, Authority theorists	Crozier, Hickson et al., Zald, Cyert and March, Pettigrew Burns, Dalton	Clegg
Primary Concern	Order	Conflict	Order
Theoretical Orientation	Prescriptive	Descriptive	Analytic
Central Notions of 'Power'	Systems/behavioural power Institutional authority	Systems/ exchange power Institutional authority	Domination
Theory of Political Order	Formalist/ Rationalist	Balance (natural or referee)	Hegemonic
Theory of Political Conflict	None	Conflict within formal rules	Limited/ insignificant conflict with- in political order
Organisational Dimension	Vertical	Horizontal	Vertical
"Face of Power"	Neither	First	Second
Consensus	Assumed; formal	Assumed; normative	'Bedrock'; precognitive
Change	Static (via formalism)	Processual within stable structure	Ahistorical static (via depth analogy)
Main political actors	Managers	Managers	Managers
Basic Advantages	None	Burns/Dalton approach stress- es the richness of politics as experienced by actors; emphas- ises the possi- bilities of political action.	Clegg's version locates politics within its socio-economic context; stresses the limits to and impossi- bilities of action.

These types of approach more-or-less summarise the arguments presented in Part One and should be understood as referring to patterns or tendencies in the academic theorising of organisational power and politics. The last two points of comparison in the table - about the main political actors and the basic advantages of the three approaches - need some expansion before considering the emergent theories that will frame future discussion.

The first of these points can be dealt with fairly briefly. The study of organisational power, authority and politics has usually been examined by observing the behaviour of members of management. The unitary approach inevitably relates to managerial actions because it locates power, authority and control in the top echelons of the organisation, and the lower participants' actions are predictable responses to that 'power'. The critical approach of Clegg also focuses theoretically on managers because it is their power position which is structurally created and socially (pre-cognitively) accepted as legitimate. Empirically, therefore, Clegg studies the management of his building site, not the workers. There is no theoretical reason for the political-conflict model's concentration on management power and politics - indeed it encourages the view that all groups in the organisation participate in the power-conflict process - but the greater visibility of politics amongst managers (including managers as "representatives" of departments) appears to have encouraged such an empirical locus of study.<sup>1</sup>

In Chapter Five, I suggested that political action involved two facets which both required analysis: first, politics concern the striving of human beings to control their lives given the circumstances that confront them; they are also about the inability of men and women to effect such control for various reasons. In short, the study of organisational politics involves the understanding of the social possibilities and impossibilities of power actions at various levels of the organisation. In Chapter Four, I argued that the 'political action' variant of the political-conflict

approach and Clegg's depth analysis of organisational power together present us with themes and problems that can guide the process of *a priori* theorising. The former approach stresses the creative, voluntaristic facet of politics by demonstrating how participants act within and outwith the 'formal' power structure and use the latter informally to further organisational, departmental and non-organisational goals. In contrast, Clegg argues that opportunities for action are not as they appear on the surface, and the observable conflicts created by active attempts to influence the organisational process are insignificant when seen in the deeper context of organisational power. Whereas the promise of Burns' and Dalton's work lies in its concentration on political conflict and the human striving to realise social possibilities, Clegg's 'critical' approach offers theoretical insights into the political nature of organisational order and how social actions become thwarted by the structural existence and (tacit) social awareness of impossibilities or barriers.

Having brought together these three types of approach and compared them on certain points of significance for the study of organisational politics, it is now necessary to abstract from the previous analysis certain conceptual themes which are capable of providing important analytical axes to further that study.

## 6.2 Conceptual Points of Reference

Most of the organisational approaches considered have more-or-less exclusively focused on power and authority in the context of managerial behaviour, so that it is hardly surprising that politics have tended to reproduce common-sense wisdoms about the functioning and location of authority or the competitive nature of organisational (i.e. managerial) power. It is the purpose of Part Three of the thesis to look behind these wisdoms, and this is to be achieved by extending discussion beyond the assumptions and propositions that characterise the types of approaches outlined. It is, of course, not possible herein to elaborate all issues of relevance to the political dimension of organisational life; but

the critical arguments of Parts One and Two have suggested certain conceptual themes which, if utilised with care and in conjunction, may provide insightful points of reference for the development of a sensitising framework for the analysis of that dimension. In this section I shall introduce these themes and their inter-relationships.

The three conceptual themes in question have emerged in response to the needs to organise theoretical material and to resolve basic problems in the literature. Following sociological conventions, it is helpful to conceive each theme as a dichotomous pair of concepts, pointing to important features of power and politics; moreover, each theme, so conceived, may be treated with reference to the other themes (cf. Baldamus, 1976). It is also notable that these themes relate to ongoing debates that have divided the social scientific establishment over the last twenty-five years, viz. those on Community Power, order vs. conflict theory and structural vs. interpretive sociology. The themes are incorporated respectively in the conceptions of the first and second faces of power, political order and political conflict, and impossibility and possibility. The approach that develops around these conceptual themes is therefore a conscious attempt to re-establish contact between general sociological theory and organisation theory (see Chapter One), but, on the other hand, does not pretend to be a detailed contribution to any one of the debates mentioned. At best, I hope to show that the substance of each debate may be better appreciated if understood in the context of the issues raised by the other debates. More specifically, I believe that interrelating the three conceptual themes, followed by a deeper analysis of the issues thus raised is one fruitful way of illuminating the topic of organisational power and politics.

#### 6.2.1 The Two Faces of Power

Possibly the most important contribution to the theory of organisational power made by Clegg's depth structuralist approach (1975), is the application of Bachrach and Baratz's (1971) famous

argument to the organisational sphere. The distinction between the two faces of power is analytical and differentiates between the concrete, observable exercise of power, and the abstract logic or structure in which all such exercises are rooted. Since overt displays of power and subsequent decisions are dependent upon those issues which are allowed to be raised by the "way the system works", a full discussion of politics requires an understanding of the abstract tendencies or biases of the structural framework of power. (cf. Bachrach and Baratz, 1971; 1973; Balbus, 1971; Frey, 1971).

The analysis of the second face of power presupposes a satisfactory theory of the way it relates to the first face. One of the problems with advocates of the two faces thesis - and, I believe, implicit in Clegg's more refined version - is the tendency to introduce a greater or lesser degree of deterministic power to the (deep) analytic structure of power. The postulate of voluntarism, however, precludes giving such a quality to the "structure of dominancy", and the resolution of this problem is central to my position.

At this stage, I shall simply assert my belief that the distinction (and the articulation) between the structural predispositions of power embedded in the institutional operation of society and the overt displays of power visible in any particular social arena, is indispensable to the analysis of politics in that arena. The conceptual and theoretical implications of this theme will occupy much attention in the following chapters.

#### 6.2.2. Political Order and Political Conflict

In Part One it was helpful to distinguish between approaches according to whether their major concern was to explain organisational order or organisational conflict in terms of the uses or the patterns of power and authority. Some approaches took shape around the problems of the political integration of the organisation while others conceived of conflict as the major focus of political actions.

Much professional capital and theoretical mileage have been had from the order-conflict debate, and it is therefore inconceivable that there is much to be gained from either summarising it or participating in it. Whether the approaches differ as 'theories', 'perspectives' or 'ideologies', and whether they are compatible or not for whatever reason remain interesting topics for speculative discussion. I consider the notions as forming a second conceptual theme which can perform a sensitising function for the analysis of organisational power and politics. I shall be employing the terms to refer to concepts rather than approaches : to refer, that is, to organisational states that provide the context for particular exercises of power, and which the latter in turn create, reinforce and change.

As a matter of definition, therefore, the framework to be developed expects power to be implicated in both organisational states.

### 6.2.3 Possibilities and Impossibilities

The third conceptual theme is based upon the proposition, introduced explicitly in Chapter Five, that the analysis of organisational politics must involve consideration of the two facets of social action i.e. choice and constraint. It is essential to examine those factors which give rise to the experience of what is and what is not possible and how social actors act upon such experience to produce the political process - conflictful or orderly - which is part of everyday life at every level of the organisation.

It is here argued that the theorising task is aided by concepts of possibilities and impossibilities. Politics may refer to the "art of the possible", but every politician's possibilities are from the start restricted, and any success he may enjoy will have intended and unintended repercussions for the possibilities of others - these possibilities, that is, may only be realisable by rendering impossible other participants goals (imposition of such

constraint may of course be the aim of the first person).

'Impossibilities', then, stress the fact that social life involves constraints, whereas 'possibilities' play a dual theoretical role: first, of providing a conceptual device that insists, in the end, on the analysis of politics as social action; second, of including, in theoretical guise, the methodological injunction to keep analysis open to empirical possibilities.

These conceptual themes stand independently of each other, and, as unrelated themes bear directly upon the conceptual problems involved in the analysis of organisational politics. However, it is my contention that the *analysis* of the latter benefits more significantly by seeing these themes in juxtaposition to each other. The interrelationships between these themes produce points of reference for the theoretical development of the thesis, so that, in their interdependence, the three themes above may be considered as the "analytical axes" of the theoretical discussion in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine.

In order to organise this discussion, I have taken the "two faces of power" theme as the main analytical axis which will provide the central points of reference for the remaining chapters. Taking the "two faces of power" theme as the focus point, I can now present the outline of the theoretical framework by relating the other two themes to it and tracing the theoretical problems to which they point.

### 6.3 Images of Order and Conflict in the Two Faces of Power

The analysis of organisational power and politics may first benefit from the cross-reference of these two analytical axes. Power is conceived as involving concrete uses or exercises (politics) and as being structurally grounded in the context of its use; further, power and politics both reflect and reinforce or change processes of order and conflict. While bearing in mind that such dichotomous distinctions are oversimplifications of the conceptual

problems encapsulated within them, we can nevertheless draw some interesting implications from their consideration. Figure 6.2 represents the interrelationship between these analytical axes.

Figure 6.2 Order and Conflict in the Two Faces of Power

	Order	Conflict
Politics (first face)	(1) Politics of integration and consensus	(2) Politics of resistance and struggle
Structural framework of power (second face)	(3) Structural pre-dispositions towards order	(4) Structural predispositions towards conflict

In this view order and conflict are conceived as characterising power in both its faces. Without pre-empting discussion below it is possible to indicate some of the theoretical implications of this juxtaposition of analytical axes.

The critical examination of the literature pertinent to organisational power revealed two approaches that are particularly insightful - Clegg's critical approach and the Burns/Dalton political action view. The former intentionally concentrates on the "neglected" face of power and, in the ways described in Chapter Four, produces an effective theory of political order based upon precognitive consensus over the structure of dominancy. This focus on the taken-for-granted state of order induced by deep-lying structural principles relates power and its exercise (i.e. politics) to the material form of life which constitutes the premises of industrial organisation in capitalist society, and therefore speaks to the theoretical problem in cell 3 of Figure 6.2.

The major contribution<sup>2</sup> of the political action approach, on the other hand, is to the understanding of the problem of cell 2. The analysis of the group-basis of organisational politics and the study of the latter in terms of conflict and struggles over issues of immediate concern to the actors in the organisation restricts this approach, for the most part, to the understanding of political conflict and its concrete social accomplishment. Both approaches make fundamental inroads into the topic of organisational power and politics, but each is limited to certain aspects and tends to overlook what, on *a priori* grounds, appear to be problems of potentially equal importance.<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly, there appears to be a recurrent tendency to treat first conflict and the concrete exercise of power (its "action" face) and second order and the structural framework of power as almost-natural conceptual and theoretical allies. (cf. Horton, 1966, p.703ff.). While they do constitute important facets of and problems for the theoretical framework I am proposing, Figure 6.2 suggests that they do not exhaust the possibilities. A sole concern for the structural predispositions towards order and stability inevitably directs attention away from the fact that the same structural background of power may also be conducive to the creation of conflict relationships to be enacted in the concrete political process. Marxist or 'radical'<sup>4</sup> traditions have always recognised the possibility (often expressed as an inevitability) of structural predispositions towards conflict, with its implications for social change, but Clegg's neglect of this theoretical problem renders his critical approach as partial as the political-conflict view which he seeks to criticise. For diametrically-opposed but logically-compatible reasons, by borrowing from and reinforcing the conventional "affinities" referred to above, the critical approach is subject to the same shortcoming as its pluralist antagonists; both treat the "rules of the game" or the "form of life" as necessarily internally consistent. When this assumption is dropped, the possibility of *structural* predispositions towards conflict arises. This theoretical problem is indicated in cell 4 of Figure 6.2.

Just as the theoretical relationship between the structural background of power and conflict in organisational relations needs to be articulated, so too it is necessary to understand that the political order of organisations is not pre-ordained either by a structural-cum-cultural determinism (implicit in Clegg) or through a convenient balance of pluralist forces. In fact, order is actively accomplished from within the organisational arena, so that the politics of order (cell 1) need to be treated as a distinct theoretical problem of no less importance than the other previously-mentioned problems. In this way it is possible to elaborate the political aspects of both axes of analysis.

#### 6.4 Possibilities and Impossibilities in the Two Faces of Power

A similar examination of the second pair of axes allows the discovery of a number of further points of reference for theoretical development below.

Figure 6.3 Impossibilities and Possibilities in the Two Faces of Power.

	Impossibilities	Possibilities
Politics (First face)	I Social impossibilities	II Social possibilities
Structural Framework of Power (Second face)	III Structural impossibilities	IV Structural possibilities

In Chapter Five, power was seen in its relation to the social and intentional exercise of constraint, and it was argued that politics - the active pursuit of opportunities and attempts to control the constraints (intentional or otherwise) imposed by virtue of one's participation in the organisation - were related to the network of perceived social possibilities and impossibilities

of action. Politics involve both social opportunity and social constraint, and may create order and conflict in an organisation through the enactment of intentions; furthermore intentions (and processes of organisational conflict and order) may themselves affect and be affected by the unanticipated consequences of concrete actions (i.e. in the first face).

Possibilities and impossibilities interrelate with intentions and 'unintentions' to produce the social process of organisational politics, but, if the analysis so far is accurate, the argument needs to be extended beyond the "first face".

"... our acts do not intend to defeat themselves and are not defeated merely or exclusively through what they intend. They are defeated also through the obduracy of nature and social reality"  
(Lichtman, 1970, p.78).

Organisational politics, that is, are not free-floating, existing in a social vacuum, but can only be fully understood with reference to structural factors which act to delimit or facilitate certain courses of internal action.

Figure 6.3 portrays the possible relationships between the second pair of analytical axes. If we construe organisational power and politics as requiring study at two "levels" of analysis (i.e. as possessing a 'structural' and an 'action' face), and if they are further conceived as emerging from the possibilities and impossibilities of organisational action, the conceptual framework discloses four more theoretical problems. As with the discussion of Figure 6.2 above, two of these problems have been attended to by the two approaches already mentioned.

Clegg's structural analysis of power in organisations allies the (second face) concept of domination with the production of action impossibilities which are known but often unarticulated because of their grounding in an unreflective "understanding" of

'how organisations (should) work'. The structure of domination, in rendering certain actions impossible or literally unthinkable, creates a predisposition towards the (orderly) reproduction of itself. In such circumstances we may speak of *structural* impossibilities i.e. the structural context of power makes certain types of project unobtainable whatever actors contrive to do.

The political action approach, on the other hand, places particular emphasis upon politics as a means of pursuing perceived possibilities. Remaining on the concrete level of the observation and examination of organisational situations, actors are seen as having distinct opportunities to control their own destinies through their own, group-supported efforts. Such an analysis of *social* possibilities - the pursuit of which generates organisational conflict - provides a basis for understanding a second relevant problem for a theory of organisational politics.

These approaches deal respectively with cells III and II in Figure 6.3, and leave untouched two remaining problems. The first of these problems (cell I) implies that the concrete social interactions that are identifiable as politics need to be examined in terms of not only perceived (social) possibilities but also perceived (social) impossibilities. Political actors in organisations, as in any other arena, develop an awareness of what projects are open to them and what are closed (and probable degrees of openness and closure) - a consciousness, that is, of the structural framework of power which they face, for the most part, as unalterable facts of life.<sup>5</sup> Needless to say, there is no *a priori* reason to expect that actors' everyday theories will provide accurate images of the real structural predispositions since it is possible for image and reality to diverge significantly - indeed a person's experiences of a structure may reinforce, not knowledgeable acceptance of the latter's premises, but an alternative set of premises. In such cases, however apparently pressing or demanding the structural framework of power, the courses of action followed in an organisation can only be explained in terms of the 'theory'

or 'theories' which are meaningfully applied by the actors themselves. The latter's *achievements*, of course, are not explicable with such limited reference. This argument, to be elaborated in Chapters Seven and Eight, thus stresses the importance of understanding how actors themselves perceive their social possibilities *and* impossibilities.

The final problem to emerge from this discussion (cell IV) concerns the opportunities for action which are structurally predisposed. At the concrete level of analysis, social possibilities are frequently negotiable and always require the energies and efforts of actors to pursue them, but, quite often, opportunities for action by members of the organisation are created by the structural logic of society and the organisation. In such cases we may refer to *structural possibilities*. For example, the career structure and the allocation of discretion differentially offer opportunities for individuals and groups to pursue. As with structural impossibilities, such possibilities are not determinative of socio-political actions, although they do establish predispositions which, being perceived and enacted, may be realised by organisational participants. Furthermore, the divergence between structural and social possibilities exists as both a theoretical problem and an empirical possibility.

In this chapter I have drawn from Parts One and Two three important conceptual themes and, in relating them together, I have outlined the bare bones of a framework within which academic theorising about organisational power and politics may take place. The more complex contours of this theoretical development will be explored in Part Three. The simplifications involved in operating with a set of dichotomous analytical axes are fairly clear - e.g. structural predispositions possess different degrees of possibility and impossibility for different actors in different positions at different times on different issues, so that organisational politics may take on a more-or-less open or a more-or-less closed character

according to these contingencies. The ramifications of such 'grey' areas in these oversimple distinctions remain to be examined.

So far I have hinted at the advantages of such a sensitising theoretical framework which builds upon, and goes beyond, the conventional conceptual affinities that relate political action/conflict/possibility and structural-power/order/constraint. It is my contention that a fuller understanding of organisational power and politics - and one which allows for a wider range of empirical possibilities - must consider the interrelated theoretical issues which have been raised in this chapter.

NOTES

1. The main exception to this amongst the studies included in this category is Crozier's investigation of work-group conflict between maintenance and production workers.
2. The reader's attention is once again drawn to the fact that, while the works of Burns and Dalton show those affinities outlined in Chapter Three that make it possible to consider their approaches as being theoretically similar, it would be inaccurate to treat both *sociologists* as saying identical things on the subject of organisational politics. Burns, for example, is certainly not silent on the broader structural factors involved in influencing the organisation's power structure (cf. Burns and Stalker, 1961; Burns, 1961), although his *major* contribution - as with Dalton's - is best understood at the level of social action.
3. Their *actual* significance is of course an empirical question, but, from the theoretical viewpoint, it is of the utmost importance not to prejudge (and hence pre-determine) the possibilities that the empirical world contains. (See Chapter Five).
4. In this context, 'radical' implies an analysis that goes one step beyond a 'critical' approach such as Clegg's. A radical viewpoint would incorporate the critical appreciation of power and its operation, but extend the analysis to comprehend what this appreciation means for social change, i.e. in the terminology developed in Chapter Five, it would keep open empirical possibilities through theoretical devices.
5. Their consciousness or awareness may include, of course, an intent to render alterable those "facts". See Chapter Eight below.

PART THREE

ORGANISATIONAL POWER AND POLITICS :  
AN INTERPRETIVE SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE STRUCTURAL FRAMEWORK OF ORGANISATIONAL POWER

I have argued that political actions within formal organisations cannot be adequately understood without reference to the nature of the context in which they are located. To treat the context as politically neutral or innocent is to overlook major predispositions which objectively channel or shape the behaviour of organisational participants as they attempt to control their own work lives and, relatedly, those of others. Such purposive actions involving strategies, tactics and the exercise of power (i.e. politics) need to be *explained* with reference to the aims and general theorising of actors themselves - this is the major assumption underlying the thesis - but they cannot be *understood* without prior knowledge of the structural and social contexts in which these interpretive activities take place. In the present chapter, which must be read in conjunction with Chapters Eight and Nine, I shall examine the notion of a "structural framework" of organisational power both as a general conception, for all social arenas (organisational or otherwise) are "contextualised", and, more specifically in relation to formal organisations. Further, for the sake of discussion I shall focus more narrowly upon industrial organisations in Britain (see 7.2). This exploration of the conception of structural framework in such a specific context does not constitute an exhaustive delineation of relevant issues, but serves to illustrate the more abstract theoretical propositions which are intended to sensitise the researcher to significant aspects of the topic of organisational power and politics.

The uses of power which concern this thesis occur in organisational arenas, and they may be structurally predisposed in two ways. First, the organisational arena which envelops the process of politics, is structured and ordered by procedures, mechanisms and rationalities. Second, and more abstractly, organisations are themselves embedded in a societal/institutional context which, in its established structure, advocates and provides for certain ways

of "doing things" rather than other ways. The structural framework of organisational power thus has both societal/institutional aspects, and more localised organisational aspects; it is my contention that the *initial* task of any attempt to explain organisational politics is the delineation of structural factors which predispose the activities of participants. These factors *do not determine* political actions, but they do impinge on actors' lives directly and indirectly. Sociological explanation revolves around understanding how actors make sense of (i.e. theorise) their purposes within the set of circumstances which confronts them, and which in general they do not choose.

To summarise, in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine, I shall be exploring concepts and propositions regarding three interrelated phenomena: the process of organisational politics itself; the structural framework in which that process is rooted; and the interpretive activities of organisational participants which mediate between political actions and their social and structural contexts. As explained in Chapter One, my interest is particularly in developing a sensitising framework in which the participants' interpretive activities - their everyday theorising - is central. Chapters Eight and Nine, the bulk of Part Three, reflect this overriding theoretical interest. However, political actions are not free-floating, so, in the present chapter, I must examine their *structural* context.<sup>1</sup> In limiting attention at present to impersonal, structural predispositions, and thereby more-or-less ignoring social actors and their theorising, it should be borne in mind that such a distinction is artificially created for the purposes of clarification. As I shall show in the rest of Part Three, the structural framework has no simple objective existence as many structuralists are wont to assert. Readers interested in a preview of the arguments to come might like to consult Figure 9.2 (on p.386).

In Section 7.1, I shall be examining the conception of 'structural framework' in abstract, and this notion will be elaborated in Section 7.2 in the specific context of British industrial

organisations. Sections 7.3 and 7.4 are devoted to a consideration of how the structural framework of industrial organisation predisposes the potentiality to have and use power by bringing into the argument the two analytical axes (structural possibilities/impossibilities and structural order/conflict) introduced in Chapter Six. Section 7.5 is rather like a post-script to the previous three sections: in briefly looking at trade union organisation, it serves both to extend the complement the analysis of the structural framework of industrial organisations, and to provide a second illustration of how this major conception clarifies the structural biases built into formally organised social actions.

### 7.1 The Conception of 'Structural Framework'

The history of the term 'social structure' is long and is tied to the history of sociology itself, but its variation in use and meaning is at least as notable as its historical significance. It is not appropriate here to conduct a survey of the concept and its meaning<sup>2</sup>, but in order to emphasise the distinction between my use and other available uses I shall refer to 'structural framework' throughout the remaining chapters. As I shall argue in more detail below, 'structural framework' - like conventional concepts of social structure - refers to an 'objective' aspect of social life, but, unlike the conventional usages, it does not possess any direct (or implicit) powers of social determination. Instead of being an 'entity' confronting actors with pre-ordained (normative or typified) courses of action, 'structural framework' is conceived as a set of predispositions or tendencies which *favour* certain courses of action but whose effects can only be understood by examining the interpretive work of social actors.

The notion of structural framework emerges from the need to conceptualise the 'second face of power' without falling into any one of four traps. First, as already implied, the 'second face of power' cannot have theoretical powers of determination,

for this would contravene the postulate of voluntarism. Second, the 'second face' must be kept *analytically* distinct from the 'first face' of politics, or the distinction loses much of its theoretical strength. Third, the 'second face' should not be restricted to a role of imposing constraints (or impossibilities) on political actions. Finally, it should not be so conceptualised as to deny empirically possible actions or states e.g. conflict, change.

The 'two faces of power' thesis entered my theoretical arguments via Clegg's interpretation (1975) of Weber's theory of domination in terms of Bachrach and Baratz's important distinction (1971, 1963), and yet neither the latter nor Clegg satisfactorily avoid the above traps. Since Clegg begins from explicitly interpretive foundations, his pitfalls are particularly informative. Clegg's interpretation of Weber's "structure of dominancy" has been one of the most important influences on my theoretical argument, but the use of the depth analogy and the failure to develop a satisfactory theory of interpretive work in social action give his structural concept connotations of determinism. Moreover, determinism, lack of social action and a sole focus on organisational order provide Clegg's critical approach with a highly restricted view of organisational conflict (see 4.3).

Bachrach and Baratz (1963, 1971), writing in the context of the Community Power Debate, initiated the 'two faces of power' line of criticism of pluralist approaches by suggesting that the socio-political machinery which guides the expression of power in society, by virtue of its structure, favours certain ways of doing things independently of the desires or purposes of individuals. The bias which is incorporated in the organised framework of power influences the course of politics by shaping the nature of issues that may be subjected to the democratic process (e.g. Bachrach and Baratz, 1971, p.378). The presumption of these authors, as with Clegg, is that the biases of the second face of power favour only stability, order and the generation of consensus. Also, in spite of locating the second face of power at an abstract level, Bachrach

and Baratz, unlike Clegg, misleadingly conceive such power in terms of concrete exercises which they call "nondecision-making", i.e.

"... the *practice* of limiting the scope of actual decision-making to 'safe' issues by *manipulating* the dominant values, myths, and political institutions and procedures" (Bachrach and Baratz, 1963, p.632; my emphasis).

"Nondecision-making" is very probably a significant feature of the process of politics, but attributing 'concrete exercises' of power to the second face of power can only weaken the importance of the concept (see 9.2).

I hope to demonstrate that the conception of 'structural framework' is helpful in incorporating into the study of organisational politics the major themes of the 'second face of power', while avoiding the pitfalls outlined above. For the sake of explication, I shall treat the 'second face' as being analytically independent of the first face, but the later discussion of concrete processes will counteract this strategic analytical oversimplification.

'Structural framework' refers to a set of interrelated predispositions in social action and social processes which are grounded in the "way things work" in the society (community, organisation) in question. These predispositions may or may not be realised - and the probability of realisation may itself vary in different sets of historico-economic circumstances e.g. see Section 7.4 - according to how social actors make sense of them in concrete social arenas. A description of the structural biases of a system is thus, by itself, not sufficient to explain the social and political actions in any social situation so that how the biases are perceived and enacted is clearly a significant theoretical problem.

The structural framework may be understood as involving two facets: first, an abstract logic<sup>3</sup> or theory about the way things are; and second, a set of concrete institutional arrangements which embody that logic (or to put it another way, from which that logic may be inferred). The latter concrete procedures, mechanisms etc. are those "factual" aspects of social (or organisational) life which social actors have to confront *directly* as externally-given facts. The abstract logic, and the assumptions from which it derives its 'rationality' may be seen as the "dominant theory" of how the system works. At one level, the logic is a descriptive theory, accounting reasonably accurately for what the social world is like; additionally, however, the logic has an ideological dimension, because the normal, taken-for-granted, obvious nature of how things are easily transposes a descriptive theory into normative theory - that this is how things *should* be. The very existence of institutional procedures and arrangements thereby confirms not only the descriptive aspects of the dominant theory but also, indirectly or directly, its ideological aspects.

One of the most important features of the "second face of power" incorporated in the 'structural framework' conception, is that it avoids the trap of personalising structural predispositions in the operation of power. Westergaard and Resler (1976) capture the importance, and the essence of the impersonality of the biases of the structural framework :

"Many social scientists talk about power - or control, influence, and so on - as if these necessarily involve action by individuals or groups ... [But] that sort of approach, on its own, neglects the point that individuals or groups may have the effective benefits of 'power' without needing to exercise it in positive action. We have more in mind here than just the fact that some people are able to pull strings behind the scenes: string-pulling is still an active exercise of influence,

even if it is difficult to detect. What we have in mind is a passive enjoyment of advantage and privilege, obtained merely because of 'the way things work', and because those ways are not exposed to serious challenge" (Westergaard and Resler, 1976, p.142).

Nondecision-making, for example, is a relevant "active exercise" of power, but does not *by itself* illustrate or signify the biases which are introduced into such concrete processes of power by virtue of the structural context within which the latter take place.

"To put the point in general terms, there is power inherent in *anonymous* social mechanisms and assumptions - in '*social institutions*' - not just in individuals and groups" (ibid., p.143; my emphasis).

The anonymous, impersonal, patterned features of the "way the system works", of the institutional logic of society in general, are characteristic of what I am calling the structural framework of (organisational) power.

One of the neatest ways to differentiate between the anonymous inbuilt predispositions of power and politics, and the "personalised", observable enactments of politics is to distinguish between the 'system' and the 'social' levels of analysis. This distinction, which Lockwood (1964) develops specifically in his discussion of functionalist and conflict theories, reflects some of the major aspects of the two faces of power :

"Whereas the problem of social integration focuses attention upon the orderly or conflictful relationships between the *actors*, the problem of system integration focuses on the orderly or conflictful relationships between the *parts* of a social system" (Lockwood, 1964, p.245).

In a political context, the problem of social integration in organisations clearly relates to the first face of power, and that of *system* integration to its second face.

The structural framework may be likened to the logic of the 'system' (in Lockwood's sense) i.e. the way in which the "institutional patterns" (ibid. p.245), as " 'depersonalised' processes or parts" (Mouzelis, 1974, p.395), interrelate to make the whole operational. The logic or 'dominant theory', which underlies the structural framework, may be impersonal and abstract, and, by itself, incapable of explaining *social* action, but by its permeation of the basic machinery of society and the ideas which are part of the available stock of knowledge, it becomes consciously or unconsciously "known" to constitute some of the basic facts of social and organisational life. The system works in a certain way, and its predispositions become stored up in those "uneventful routines" (Westergaard and Resler, 1976, p.144) whose obviousness constituted 'bedrock' for Clegg's building-site workers (1975, p.82ff.). The 'normality', the 'banality', the anonymity of the way the system works are for members of society

"... part of the established landscape of a world which is not of their making but which they have to live in nevertheless" (Nichols and Beynon, 1977, p.190).

Indeed, as Westergaard and Resler (1976) argue, part of the effective power derived from such structural predispositions, ingrained in the system, lies in its taken-for-granted and thus concealed nature (see also Clegg, 1975, e.g. p.119ff.).

From the anonymous, obvious characteristics of the rationality which corresponds to the predispositions in the system, emerges another feature of the structural framework viz. the "obduracy of nature and social reality" (Lichtman, 1970, p.78) for members of society whose lives are "structured by externally given facts" (Nichols and Armstrong, 1976, p.31). It is in this sense

that the structural framework of organisational power stands apart from organisational participants and is thus 'objective'. Given their 'naturalness' and 'inevitability', the core assumptions of the society and its logic become given system parameters, confronting (but not necessarily recognised or accepted by) members of that society in their various arenas of social action. *How* members deal or cope with these externally given facts of life, built into the structural framework of society and presented as unalterable and normal, is the major sociological problem to which I return in the following chapters.

So far I have presented the structural framework as the logical and abstract framework of a society, which in its impersonality and 'obviousness' assumes a greater or lesser degree of objectivity for social actors. In an important sense, the structural framework *is* independent of social actors as explained above, but in an equally important sense it is wholly dependent upon the latter who, through their interpretive and social actions sustain (or not) its 'existence' (i.e. its predispositional influence on social life). The fact that assumptions may be questioned and 'logics' supplanted - in short the fact of the ultimate contingency of any social formation - must be continually borne in mind if the theoretical framework is to remain sensitive to future empirical possibilities rather than emphasise (and thus reinforce) the 'power' inherent in the set of structural arrangements in operation at any given time.

The context of all social action is structured in such ways as to establish for acting individuals and groups identifiable possibilities and impossibilities (within the system assumptions), and to predispose social life towards order or conflict in certain circumstances. Possibilities and impossibilities, order and conflict, are thus structurally predisposed. However social actions occur not in abstract 'systems', nor in society *in toto*, but in concrete social arenas. It is therefore imperative to know how these structural predispositions and the institutional premises and logic of the social system find expression in arenas

of social action. By a simple extension to the conception of structural framework, it is possible to incorporate the fact that concrete arenas of social action are themselves structured.

Taking the relevant social arena as the organisation, which provides the more 'localised' context for those social actions which pertain to this thesis, the structural framework of *organisational power* may be seen as comprising two inter-related levels. Mouzelis (1974) has much the same notion in mind in his discussion of Crozier's research (1964) :

"... in order to understand such [power] strategies, *institutional* arrangements must be taken into account ... Both 'local' institutional arrangements (e.g. rules elaborated and followed by management or the workers) and wider societal ones (e.g. institutions of property, of collective bargaining, of the labour contract, the labour market, etc.) are relevant for understanding the actions and strategies of the various groups". (Mouzelis, 1974, p.398).

The societal/institutional logic is thus complemented by a local organisational rationality;<sup>4</sup> the latter is both a dominant theory or ideology of how organisations in general do or should work, and, being incorporated in organisational procedures and machinery, a set of direct organisational facts which provide organisational participants with distinct predispositions. This organisational rationality may be understood as comprising two constituent rationalities: first, an economic rationality which advocates appropriate ways and criteria for allocating resources according to the premises underpinning the organisation; second, an administrative rationality which concerns the appropriate ways of controlling or managing the organisation. The two are, of course, interrelated and best understood in terms of their mutual relationship to the broader institutional logic.

To summarise, the structural framework is conceptualised as a set of historically-conditioned, anonymous, impersonal predispositions for action, which emerges from the prevailing institutional logic and organisational rationality, which in turn infuses procedures, arrangements, techniques etc. with 'sense', 'reason', 'normality' and 'obviousness' - in other words, it conceptualises the basic facts of organisational life. In the next section, I shall seek to put some flesh upon these conceptual bones.

## 7.2 The Structural Framework of Power in Industrial Organisation

Politics are particular kinds of social action and *organisational* politics take place in a particular kind of social arena with its own rationality i.e. its own ways of getting things done. The analysis of organisational politics thus requires reference to the structural framework in both its societal-institutional and local-organisational senses, in such a way as to permit an understanding of those structural predispositions and biases which constitute the *given* context within which power operates. These structural predispositions towards the distribution and exercise of power provide the framework for organisational politics, but do not determine them - indeed the latter in certain circumstances may well change in part or in whole the structural framework in which they are set i.e. politics can challenge the very logic and premises which predispose them in certain directions at any given time.

In order to aid clarification of theoretical issues, and to illustrate the relevance of the conception of structural framework to the understanding of organisational power, it is useful to discuss the notion in more specific terms. There are many types of organisation (e.g. religious, educational, mass media) and these types will differ in their environments, problems, procedures etc.; ultimately, within each type, particular organisations will face their own set of structural arrangements. One of the problems of empirical research is precisely to identify the predispositions faced by specific organisations; however, it should be borne in

mind that most organisations, to the extent that they operate *within* a given society, or community, are subject to the same general logic which permeates the institutional setting of that operation. In illustrating the structural framework of organisational power, I have decided to pitch the discussion midway between a completely abstract overview of structural predispositions facing all organisations (i.e. the societal-institutional logic) and a highly fragmentary review of one specific organisation, i.e. I have restricted my attention to industrial organisations operating in Britain.

Such a limitation of scope is necessary for reasons of space, but I could have chosen any type of organisation in any society for explicatory purposes. However, because of existing biases in organisational research much more information is available about industrial organisation; and the selection of a capitalist society - specifically Britain - reflects not only an additional bias but also the fact that during the last five years a number of particularly relevant pieces of documentary research have been published.<sup>5</sup> I shall be using these same studies to illustrate theoretical points both in this chapter and in the following ones. By concentrating on industrial organisations operating in British capitalist society I shall construct a view of the institutional logic and organisational rationality which constitute the dominant theory of how such organisations (should) work, and examine how such a theory is represented in those mechanisms and procedures that circumscribe organisational power and control.

It is interesting to note that, however much theorists disagree on its implications, its interpretation or its theoretical role, 'conservative', 'liberal' and 'radical' sociologists accept the central proposition that a capitalist society (or any other type) is founded upon certain assumptions which give reason to the institutional logic which can be abstracted from the way the system works. It might also be argued that in spite of small changes (e.g. in the legal, political and economic systems), the fundamental

logic of the system has remained more or less intact over the last century. For example, the public sector of industrial organisations has grown substantially, often due to socialising philosophies and policies, but such organisations have to survive in a national and international private enterprise framework so that they are still subject to the same basic pressures associated with the core assumptions of capitalism (cf. Westergaard and Resler, 1976, p.249ff.). In spite of their often fundamental differences in approach and in interests, both Marx and Weber more or less agreed in their general assessment of the demands that the logic of capital makes on an economic and social system. The major difference between their assessments of what I am calling the structural framework of industrial organisations is largely one of focus, Marx being almost totally committed to understanding the logic of capital at a societal-institutional level, while Weber carried the analysis further into the realms of organisational rationality. Weber, however, certainly did not neglect the broader tendencies inherent within capitalism. They shared the key categories of private property, profit, 'free' commodity/labour market and division of labour, which, as core assumptions of capitalism, make rational certain modes of operating industrial organisation, while simultaneously rendering impractical, or irrational all other structural frameworks.

These structural premises of capitalism, and their logical implications for how to do things in organisations, establish an identifiable type of framework with inbuilt predispositions, which influence all levels of organisational life - the types of biases which are mobilised by organisational forms within a capitalist structural context thus become very important for understanding the political interactions and processes in organisations. The premises and logic which underlie organisational power are, at their most abstract, economic and societal, but they find expression in the rationality and forms of other institutional areas of society (e.g. the legal, the political, the educational) as well as the rationality and forms of complex organisations operating in all institutional areas. Thus any organisation (religious, industrial,

or otherwise) is subject to social, cultural and legal demands to be both economically rational and administratively rational - the latter, called 'bureaucratic' by Weber (1964), is also recognised by him as being an organisational transformation of the former.

In Britain it is possible to understand the societal-institutional logic, with which organisations in general and industrial organisations in particular, are infused and which make 'rational' their forms, procedures, mechanisms etc., primarily in terms of the logic of capital, i.e. economic premises and logic.

"At the centre of the core assumptions of our society, clearly, are the institutions of property and market, and the working premises which go with them" (Westergaard and Resler, 1976, p.249).

At the local-organisational level, for industrial organisations in particular, this broader institutional logic is reflected in both the economic rationality of the organisation, concerning the juxtaposition of profitability and market forces (cf. Clegg, 1975, p.119); and the administrative rationality whereby human and material resources are marshalled and controlled according to these economic premises. The established facts of profit, market and property rights give order to the way in which industrial organisations work and imbue with sense and rationality the operating rules, the distribution of rewards and (institutional) authority, accounting procedures etc. (cf. Martin, 1977, p.100ff.)

In order to comprehend this reflection of institutional premises and logic in the rationality of industrial organisations - and thereby to build up a more detailed picture of the latter's structural context - I intend to concentrate on the organisational 'control system'. The control system comprises a set of principles, procedures, practices, techniques, regulations etc. deliberately designed to monitor organisational behaviour and to ensure that

such behaviour is ushered towards the accomplishment of the designer's goals within a given structural framework<sup>6</sup> (cf. Mills, 1967, or Bowen, 1976, p.57ff.). This control system has both personal and impersonal aspects, but, within increasingly larger organisations, the tendency is towards the impersonal :

"To avoid the danger of losing control of the task, management builds into the organisation impersonal processes of control to influence and regulate the work behaviour of those it employs... These processes may be administrative, covering such things as complex programmes for production planning, measurement mechanisms and cost control systems; or mechanical, as in the automatic control of machine tools or continuous flow production plant." (Kynaston Reeves and Woodward, 1970, pp.44-45).

Such mechanisms may or may not succeed completely in their purpose, but they do constitute certain facts of organisational life which set up predispositions in the direction of establishing control - i.e. co-ordinating, channeling and marshalling human resources in the service of profitability within a market situation.

Resolving the problem of organisational control (for economically rational ends) leads to an administratively rational set of predispositions which indirectly present controllers and controlled alike with the facts about how industrial organisations within a capitalist structural context work (see 7.3). The problem of control, in which the questions of economic and administrative rationality, and of institutional logic and organisational rationality intersect for both organisational participants and observers, is thus at the heart of the conception of structural framework in relation to the analysis of organisational power and politics (cf. Nichols and Armstrong, 1976, p.25).

To continue with this line of argument, I shall examine several elements of the organisational control system with reference to the structural framework of industrial organisations. Since the following points are illustrative of the previous arguments - viz. that the structural framework of organisational power at the 'local' level is revealed in the economic and administrative rationality of the control system - the discussion will remain brief.

One of the most important features of organisational control and administrative rationality is the hierarchical allocation of (institutional) authority to the controllers of the control system (e.g. Weber, 1964, p.331). Inherent in this conception of authority and its allocation is the manager's right to control, which remains a firmly established and fiercely defended premise of organisational rationality (cf. Beynon, 1973, p.183). As Coates and Topham (1974) have explained, this fact of organisational life is itself deeply embedded in the institutional logic of capitalism :

"Managerial authority derives from above, from the legal owners of the business, from rights of property, from the law of contract, and from the economic power of the buyer of labour" (Coates and Topham, 1974, p.60).

The administrative rationality of authority, its allocation and rights, is not rational in its own terms, but in the context of the institutional premises and logic of society - i.e. within the broader structural framework of organisations. Thus the right to control and organise materials and people is allocated to participants in hierarchical positions.<sup>7</sup>

Authority is more immediately underpinned by formal rules which provide another mechanism whereby the 'control system' attempts to channel behaviour in a 'rational' way (rules, of course, are the essence of Weber's 'rational-legal' type of

domination). Although they nominally apply to everybody, rules in general represent and uphold the interests of the participants who identify with those goals towards which they (the rules) direct behaviour. The rules, in other words, are rational strictly in terms of the interests or ends served (cf. Gouldner, 1954, pp.20-21). Again, on *a priori* grounds, one would expect the rationality of rules to reflect and reinforce the broader institutional logic, because they provide the organisation with "ways of doing things" that appeal to cultural universalistic values while actually predisposing actions towards the realisation of that logic.

The technology of an industrial organisation is a very important part of its control system, delimiting the scope of work behaviour and discretion required to complete a job and thereby increasing the degree of rationality in the achievement of the task:

"At the unit end of the scale [of technical complexity], the nature of work is such that the mechanisms of control are relatively simple and unsophisticated. Control is exercised through the personal hierarchy of authority ... In continuous flow production, on the other hand, a mechanical framework of discipline and control is built in with the erection of the plant or installation of equipment." (Woodward, 1970, p.xi; see also Nicholls and Armstrong, 1976, p.68ff.).

Technology, and its organisation for control, is obviously not accidental, nor is it purely 'technical'<sup>8</sup> - at least to treat it as such is to miss its wider social implications :

"Technologies... are not developed or imposed extra-socially, outside of a social mode of production". (Nichols & Beynon, 1977, p.70).

Technology relates to the institutional logic of capitalism and the control potential that can be built into the production system reflects not only administrative rationality - in that it responds to the basic problem of management - but also the economic rationality of profitability.

Authority, and the more impersonal controls of rules and technology, are three aspects of the control system of industrial organisations whose operation is administratively and economically rational in the ways I have discussed. They constitute procedures or mechanisms which predispose social actions in the direction favoured by the core institutional assumptions and logic and constitute basic facts of life for organisational participants. However, as Weber argues, in a capitalist structural framework industrial organisations achieve their highest degree of (formal) rationality by developing procedures and practices in which their calculability for control purposes is stressed (e.g. Weber, 1964, p.184ff. and p.193). Organisational rationality is thus expressed in mechanisms which aim to measure organisational states in order to subject behaviour to greater and more precise control. Job evaluation/grading (e.g. Nichols and Armstrong, 1976, p.37ff.), work study (e.g. Beynon, 1973, p.135ff.), cost and quality control measures, stock purchase and planning etc. exemplify procedures intended to increase control by rendering organisational behaviour calculable and hence 'rational' with an objective degree of accuracy.

The quantitative control practice *par excellence* that was recognised by Weber for its particular significance in capitalist industrial organisation was Capital Accounting :

"Any system of economic activity oriented to profit-making, no matter how strictly it is regulated or how stringently controlled by administrative staff, presupposes effective prices, and thus capital accounting as a basis of action" (Weber, 1964, p.215).

"There is a form of monetary accounting which is peculiar to rational economic profit-making; namely, 'capital accounting'. Capital accounting is the valuation and verification of opportunities for profit and of the success of profit-making activity. It involves the valuation of the total assets of the enterprise, whether these consist in goods in kind or in money, at the beginning of a period of activity; and the comparison of this with a similar evaluation of the assets still present or newly acquired, at the end of the process". (Weber, 1964, pp.191-192).

In short, capital accounting assesses the total condition of the organisation with respect to the major premise which endows the 'way the system works' with its rationality, the profitability of capital (cf. Clegg, 1975, p.119ff.). Accountancy provides the archetype of 'formally rational' (i.e. calculable) control practices which make available precise information about past and expected future organisational states (cf. Tricker, 1967); that information permitting organisational behaviour to be more closely monitored or directed with respect to the economic rationality of the organisation (and, indirectly, the institutional logic which provides the broader structural framework of the organisation). Accountancy in industrial organisations is a set of institutionalised practices for making behaviour accountable to capital, and it therefore selects and organises information for control purposes in accordance with those core institutional assumptions that constitute its theoretical (and technical) base. The production of 'formally rational' information - and management accountancy is one component of a complex modern business information technology (cf. Tricker, 1967, pp.99ff.) - is both structurally predisposed and structurally predisposing. It is predisposed because data are collected according to specific criteria and techniques for specific purposes of accounting to capital<sup>9</sup>; it is predisposing because the (partial) 'knowledge' produced by these practices becomes part of the control system and confronts

organisational participants as externally-given and objective (in the sense of absolute and true) facts of organisational life.

A last element of the managerial control system which I shall consider in illustration of the 'local' structural framework of organisational power is the reward system. As with the other components, the reward system within industrial organisations fundamentally reflects the major premises of the capitalist system. Of special significance when considering monetary rewards (wages, salaries, dividends etc.) is, of course, the logic of the labour market, and the specific organisation's profitability in the product market. Material rewards are but one aspect of the reward system considered in relation to the problem of control.<sup>10</sup> Another reward-related mode of control is built into the nature of jobs themselves.

It is organisationally most rational, for the purposes of profitability, to exert the maximum possible amount of control over the activities of organisational participants, and I have argued that the mechanisms and practices such as rules, technology and capital accounting predispose organisational behaviour in the desired direction. The logic of capital has an inbuilt predisposition to increase formal rationality and tighten control over organisational actions through the development of new techniques and procedures<sup>11</sup>. However some organisational activities are more susceptible to this 'hemming-in' process than others, and those jobs, in which inhere greater responsibility and discretion and which are part of a career ladder, offer greater intrinsic reward than others. It is paradoxical, but inevitable (under present circumstances anyway) that the same institutional logic and economic rationality which create predispositions towards more complete control of organisational behaviour, can only do so by simultaneously creating positions with little such control.<sup>12</sup>

My aim in this section has been to illustrate the conception of the structural framework of organisational power, with

special reference to industrial organisations in capitalist Britain. I have focused on the control system of such organisations, and, by examining some of its important features - authority, rules, technology, capital accounting and rewards - I hope to have shown two things. First, at the local-organisational level, it can be seen that the control system (and its component parts) of an industrial organisation is a system of procedures and practices which derive their consistency and rationality as administrative devices from their relationship to the economic premises underpinning the organisation. Second, and relatedly, these procedures and practices, which embody economic rationality, by doing so additionally reflect the broader institutional assumptions of the structural framework with reference to which organisational rationality (administrative and economic) itself "makes sense".

In 7.3 and 7.4 I shall discuss how the structural framework of organisational power - with respect to industrial organisations - can provide a vehicle for examining the ways in which biases and predispositions are structured into organisational arenas, thereby incorporating into the analysis of organisational politics the potency of the 'second face of power' critique. Before moving on, however, two final points need to be made. First, in the arguments above I have not made reference to the structural influence of trade unions on industrial organisation, and many people would regard the former as counterweights to the logic of capital. Industrial relations procedures are part of the reality of industrial organisation in Britain, and the neglect of the representatives of organised labour is a fundamental omission. Although it is not possible to do justice to this issue in the space available, I shall return to it briefly in 7.5.

The second closing point is more in the form of a caveat, made necessary again by the simplified illustrative analysis. It should not be assumed that important aspects of the structural framework are static, as may be implied in the above discussion.

Institutional logic and organisational rationality are, I suggest, relatively stable as long as the "core assumptions" remain the same, but the procedures, techniques, practices etc. which embody that logic and rationality change as knowledge about organisational control advances. Specifically, as Weber (1964) suggests and the Chemco studies (Nicholls and Beynon, 1977; Nichols and Armstrong, 1976) witness, the institutional logic of capitalism includes a tendency towards greater precision in and increased scope of the control system. From a more historical viewpoint, Burns (1977, p.23ff.) surveys the changes in the "social technology" of organisations (specifically of the B.B.C.) and the search for efficient (rational) administrative control.

### 7.3 Structural Possibilities and Impossibilities

The structural framework of organisational power comprises abstract, impersonal "forces" - predispositions - which are exhibited in the way organisations work within the broader institutional context. The logic or rationality of the 'system' is embodied in the sets of arrangements (laws, rules, procedures, practices etc.) which prevail at both the societal/institutional and the local/organisation level and which confront actors as "obdurate" "externally-given facts" about organisational life. Before we can understand how actors deal with these structural predispositions in their (political) attempts to control their organisational lives, it is necessary to construct a picture of how the structural framework influences both the ability or potential to effect control and the politically-relevant nature of the arena in question. The first of these points relates to the conceptual theme of possibilities/impossibilities, which directs the argument in this section. In 7.4 I shall discuss the structural predispositions towards order and conflict, and their consequences for the second face of power.

The proposition upon which the conception of the structural framework (*qua* second face of power) is based, contends that the

scope and nature of political actions in organisations is from the start predisposed in certain directions by virtue of the biases which are inevitably involved in any form of organisation. The system, as it were, *prefers* some power actions over others and endows some positions (and thereby people) with greater initial capacity than other positions, to do those preferred actions. In other words opportunities for organisational or self control, and constraints against such controls, are structured *into* the way things work in an organisation. By discussing the ways in which the structural framework of organisations creates possibilities for or imposes impossibilities on organisational participants, a sketch of the second face of power may be made. As before, the general argument will be framed with respect to industrial organisations under British capitalism.

It is perhaps paradoxical that the structural framework, in which organisational politics occur, presents all organisational participants with the same facts of organisational life, yet at the same time distinguishes between participants regarding how they will be affected by the 'system'. The facts are equally "obdurate" to everybody, but more "lenient" to some people than to others. Both points require some elucidation.

In *Capital*, Marx commented upon the impersonality, even the impartiality (in a limited sense) of the logic of capital. Although the immutable laws of capitalism affect capitalists and workers differentially in many senses, they are equally "compelling" for both social groups :

"... The development of capitalist production makes it constantly necessary to keep increasing the amount of the capital laid out in a given industrial enterprise, and competition makes the immanent laws of capitalist production to be felt by each individual capitalist, as coercive external laws. It compels him to keep constantly extending his capital in order to preserve it, but extend it he cannot except by

means of progressive accumulation." (Marx in Jordan (ed.) 1972, p.229).

In this classic statement, the capitalist has to confront the same compelling facts of life as the worker: the structural framework renders certain forms of activity impossible. This of course should not be construed as meaning that the capitalist, in a concrete situation, has no choice. He may misunderstand the demands of capital or choose to ignore them, but, ultimately, on certain matters (e.g. survival as a capitalist) in certain circumstances (e.g. fierce competition, economic depression) profits can only be extracted from the production process with disastrous consequences.

In modern Britain the problem of organisational control is largely one for managers, not capitalists in the pure sense. However, in spite of the fact that profitability does not directly affect their pockets, managers are also subject to the structural logic of the system:

"... the power of capitalists and managers in capitalist society is itself circumscribed by the [anonymous social] mechanisms from which these people themselves benefit" (Westergaard and Resler, 1976, p.143).

Nichols and Beynon (1977), like Marx in *Capital* (in Bottomore and Rubels (eds.), 1963, p.158ff.), theorise the activities of managers and workers as being more or less the same within the capitalist structural framework:

"... while often living quite different lives - and belonging to different social classes - *both* managers and workers can increasingly be seen as *labour*, whose future is structured by the needs of *capital*." (Nichols and Beynon, 1977, p.xv; see also p.31ff.; and Beynon, 1973, p.95ff. and p.103; and Fletcher, 1973, p.138).

The 'impartiality' of the structural framework is demonstrated by the fact that it subjects managers, supervisors and workers alike to the same rationality or logic, built upon the core assumptions of the system.

This argument is very important for demonstrating the point in question, but it should not be overlooked that, while everybody is subject to what Westergaard and Resler (1976, p.141ff.) call the anonymous power of capital, the latter distributes power, the social potential to control and opportunities to do so, in a quite uneven manner. The same structural facts of life confront people in different (though equally compelling) ways according to how they slot into the "organisational nature of things". The logic of capital, in its institutional and organisational, economic and administrative guises, creates a formal pattern of relations and control mechanisms, as described above, which confront all organisational participants but systematically distinguishes between them in varying degrees. These procedures and practices are established to make behaviour accountable to the basic premises of the system and thereby inevitably predispose power actions and the distribution of power in certain directions. Because structural possibilities and impossibilities accord with the way the system works, their differential distribution within the organisation sets up biases as to who is in the better *initial* position to establish or expand their own control, and constitutes a basic structural fact of great political relevance.

In order to simplify explanation of this argument, I shall concentrate on two categories of participant in industrial organisations - the manager and the worker - although obviously other categories can be analysed using the same ideas.<sup>13</sup> The place of trade unions in industry rather complicates the picture, but I shall return to their role below (7.5). In general, I shall be arguing that the structural framework presents managers with greater inbuilt possibilities of using power for their own, their group's and the organisation's ends (including the shaping of these ends), whilst workers to a greater or lesser extent are faced with a fairly

extensive range of structural impossibilities which, to be politically active, they must seek to avoid, adapt or change. At any rate, lower participants start off with inbuilt disadvantages regarding control and politics. This proposition can be illustrated with reference to the predispositions structured into the organisational control system which was discussed in 7.2 above.

The most clearly discernible difference between managers and workers in industrial organisations concerns their relationship to the control system which embodies organisational rationality. Managers are to a greater or lesser extent controllers of the control system in that they design, operate and interpret the findings of the system. The nature of this relationship provides basic possibilities for political action. Workers, on the other hand, tend to have their behaviour monitored and processed by the control system, and their relationship to it is therefore characterised more by constraint than opportunity.

Being in control of the organisation (although subject overall to the logic and rationality of the structural framework) provides the manager with definite structural possibilities derived from the facts that he is endowed with institutional authority to instigate control; he is less subject to rules because of inherent difficulties in hemming-in his job; he has access to information which the control system generates; and his job is part of a career structure that provides future rewards for conducting his activities satisfactorily. Conversely, the worker is processed by the control system, and this involves being subjected to increasingly direct and precise procedures of which authority is the most personalised; being specific, the worker's job tends to be closely defined by rules, and indeed, in many circumstances, by the technological parameters of his work situation; information to which the worker has access is of a very limited, local kind, created by his own experience of a restricted aspect of the work process; his basic rewards are extrinsic, and his job is 'careerless', with limited prospects of improvement of work either within

or outwith the organisation. These four points of contrast - authority, discretion, information and career - can be elaborated to illustrate how organisational rationality stratifies the inbuilt possibilities and impossibilities of political action.<sup>14</sup>

To conduct his job 'rationally', the manager enjoys an institutionalised right to command both human and material resources. Supported by the institutionally-defined prerogatives, this authority ('domination' in Clegg's interpretation (1975) of Weber) forms the structural and ideological base of the manager's power position - a capacity which is so ingrained into the way the system works as to be taken-for-granted and impartial. How the manager acts upon his political base - for personal, sectional or organisational purposes - is a problem for further sociological analysis, but the opportunities for such action are structured into his organisational position. Contrarily, the worker starts from no structural base of institutional authority; moreover his actual political actions depend upon his ability to overcome the structurally predisposed limitations. It might be possible, for example, to generate authority of a normative type grounded in the rationality of social solidarity rather than of capitalist economics.

Fox (1974a) has analysed in some detail the distribution of types of work role in (particularly industrial) organisations, distinguishing those which are closely-defined and controlled by rules, supervision and technical aspects of the job, which, after Jacques, he calls "prescribed" roles, from "discretionary" work roles :

"By contrast, performance of the discretionary content requires, not trained obedience to specific external controls, but the exercise of wisdom, judgement, expertise. The control comes from within - it is, in the literal sense, self-control. The occupant of the role must himself choose, judge, feel, sense, consider, conclude what would be the best thing to do in the circumstances..." (Fox, 1974a, p.19).

These "circumstances" - of economic and administrative rationality - are only very broad influences which do not impinge directly on what to do. The tasks of management tend to have a high discretionary content, and discretionary work roles involve structurally-predisposed possibilities for choosing action (Loasby, 1968, p.358). Not only do managers control the control system, but also, within limits, have the inbuilt capacity to control their own organisational fates. By contrast, the work-roles of lower participants are "prescribed", with built-in constraints on self-control. Possibilities and impossibilities are therefore structured into work roles, and stratified in the same way as other major dimensions of organisational inequality (cf. Fox, 1974a, p.49ff.; Fox, 1974b, p.30ff.).

Institutional authority and discretion, allocated differentially to increase organisational rationality, are part of the structural framework of organisational power, creating for managers greater possibilities of self-control and control over others. Access to information is also structurally predisposed in favour of those controlling the control system, and the business information techniques and practices - for example, of accountancy, of work study - provide more precise data about the state of the organisation with respect to its premises. Such organisational 'knowledge' is itself an important facet of institutional authority and discretion, but may be seen, at a general level, as providing a greater range of structural possibilities for the exercise of power. Workers, or lower participants whose behaviour is directly or indirectly accountable to quantitative, precise scrutiny, find their range of actions structurally limited and their control of the work situation consequently restricted. Although much of shopfloor politics is aimed at creating some degree of influence over the supply of information and freedom from such scrutiny, the facts of organisational life are, from the start, weighted against such control.

Not only do jobs differ in control possibilities in terms of their specific content - i.e. discretion - but they also differ

in terms of future possibilities and prospects. The managerial work role is normally only one position in a time sequence of possible positions, each future step, in general, bringing socially more desirable rewards. Managers have careers which are part of their reward and control system and are basic motivators to satisfy the requirements of their present position. For managers, therefore, the organisation is a career structure (cf. Burns, 1969; Dalton, 1959) which provides the inbuilt possibility of increased inbuilt possibilities of work control.<sup>15</sup> Workers can also theoretically exercise choice over their jobs in that in a "free" labour market they are "free" to move around as they "wish". Indeed, in the 1960s many workers did just this, but this means *changing* jobs which have basically the same *limited* opportunities (cf. Beynon, 1973, p.113), rather than moving through a career with improving possibilities. Furthermore, in less buoyant economic circumstances even this limited freedom is further reduced (cf. Nichols and Armstrong, 1976, p.23; Nichols and Beynon, 1977, p.28), as the structural facts of life become increasingly compelling (see 7.4). A worker's job is normally 'career-less' and the opportunities for controlling his organisational life are structurally restricted both presently and in the future (cf. Lee, 1968).<sup>16</sup>

This brief analysis of structural possibilities and impossibilities in industrial organisations within a capitalist society suggests that 'objective' opportunities for control are distributed according to the premises and logic of the structural framework, and that this distribution is differential, providing greater political possibilities for higher participants, and limiting the possibilities (increasing impossibilities) at the lower echelons. In one sense management are like workers, both groups' actions liable to the logic of the capitalist system, but that same general logic systematically biases the allocation of opportunities to acquire power and to use it for various ends in favour of management.

#### 7.4 Structural Order and Conflict

Having looked at how the structural framework engenders distinct predispositions in the possibilities and impossibilities facing different actors in the organisational arena, it is now necessary to introduce the second analytical axis on which theoretical discussion is focused. Power and politics in any social arena revolve around the problems of order and conflict, integration and disruption; it is therefore important for the analysis of organisational power and politics to understand the structural tendencies or biases towards order and/or conflict, built into the system by virtue of the wider institutional logic and the more local organisational rationality. It can be argued that, in various conditions, organisational life is mainly predisposed towards a state of order, while in other circumstances, the same operative rationality will be conducive to conflict. More generally, whilst 'the way the system works' will almost always tend towards self-maintenance, it will also, again by its own logic, contain the empirical possibilities of conflict. Marxist theory argues with the use of dialectical logic, that the economic logic of capital itself necessarily produces social consequences that are conducive to conflict. As a general proposition then, the structural framework of organisations is here conceived as containing inherent and simultaneous predispositions towards order - due to the system's own logic of operation - and conflict, because of contradictions in that same institutional logic. It should be noted meantime that although these structural pressures are part of the facts of organisational life, it is sociologically important to know how these facts become incorporated in the (political) actions of the various participants in that arena.

It was noted in Chapter Six that there has been a tendency to focus on the orderly aspects of the second face of power. There is something rather self-evident about the proposition that the core assumptions and the logic of a system tend to maintain the latter, and the analysis of the industrial organisation's rationality and its embodiment in the control system would seem to confirm such a

proposition. This self-evidence is especially strong in societies which have experienced relatively high degrees of social stability - such as Britain. However, it is rather weak theoretically to dismiss the possibility of conflict (and change) based upon such "self-evidence", for to do so is to entangle one's own theorising within the logic of the system itself - especially within the ideological aspects of that logic. Dependence on such self-evident facts, and their reflection in what one's theory deems empirically possible, is to provide one good theoretical rationale as to why a society (or organisation) *is* orderly; but to overlook the empirical possibility of structural conflict is not only to be politically uncritical (a point which Marxists obviously consider important) but also to be theoretically so in that there is the danger of failing to appreciate (i.e. of oversimplifying) the structural framework of power and politics in society and its constituent arenas.

The structural framework, with its abstract premises and logic incorporated in an organisation's concrete *modus operandi*, by definition favours the realisation of its "promises", although their realisation is not a *fait accompli* as "optimistic" functionalists or "pessimistic" Marxists might have; both because it is inadequate to presume the compliance of actors to structural predispositions (i.e. the latter are not dictates), and because the same structural framework creates unintentionally predispositions towards conflict, often by 'logical' extension of the same facts and processes conducive to order.

Concentrating on order for the time being, classical sociological theory offers two possible structural conditions for the achievement of the pure state. The Hobbesian and simple Marxist approach ground a state of social order in the coercive enforcement (or its threat) of law and the integrative mechanisms of state. The second approach is best represented by the Parsonian/neo-Marxist viewpoints which stress (in different ways) the achievement of social order through voluntary consent to the way the system works (or its 'central values'). This convenient,

albeit oversimple distinction, can refer to analytically pure states of social order but is more usefully seen as real historical 'moments' which may arise, although the tendencies towards order normally involve some mix of the two types.

In spite of the controversies surrounding his work, it is insightful to pursue this distinction by relating Gramsci's now famous concepts of 'domination' and 'hegemony' to the notion of a structural framework. Although Gramsci's analysis was levelled at society *in toto*, the ideas appear to shed much light on the nature of organisational order. In his discussion of aspects of Gramsci's thought, Femia (1975) identifies these two concepts with something akin to what I have been calling the structural framework :

"Gramsci states that the supremacy of a social group may manifest itself in two forms : 'domination' [*dominio*], which is realised through the coercive organs of the state, and intellectual and moral leadership which is objectified in and exercised through the institutions of civil society, the ensemble of educational, religious and associated institutions. This latter form of supremacy constitutes hegemony [*egemonia*]." (Femia, 1975, p.30).

Although, as Williams (1960, p.587) has suggested, these concepts have implicit connotations about direction or manipulation by a dominant group, it would seem feasible and pertinent to present purposes, to consider 'domination' and 'hegemony' as general modes of structural order. These concepts are used to refer to socio-political situations as 'moments' in history where the strain towards order has been achieved through structural processes either of force, coercion and constraint or of "... persuasion, consent and consolidation" (Williams, 1960, p.591).

The application of coercion and the acquisition of consent may be considered as alternative modes of creating an orderly, stable organisation in which (organisational) rationality may be most easily realised. As I have already suggested, the structural framework should be viewed not only as presenting a logic which is descriptive of how the system works - and thus how it confronts people as 'factual' - but also as being a normative theory or ideology which functions to legitimate the facts as "right", "good", "natural" etc. The 'factual' and 'ideological' aspects of the structural framework are not, of course, independent - indeed, in certain circumstances, ideology becomes so obvious and unnoticed as to become a fact of life itself. In this light, it should be remembered that I am not here concerned with the concrete process of applying coercion (or threats) or of engineering consent - both of which emphatically belong to the 'first face' of organisational politics; what is of importance is that the facts of everyday organisational life, the associated theories of how the system should work, and the mechanisms and procedures which are infused with this logic, are conducive to organisational order in the two modes described, viz. domination and hegemony. Relating to the discussion in 7.3, domination would involve the tightening of the range of structural possibilities (i.e. more rigid limitations on organisational actions, including what is politically possible), whereas hegemony may well involve extending the range of structural possibilities within the given framework - for example, in order to generate trust relations (cf. Fox, 1974a, p.271ff.) or moral commitment.

Within the organisation, the mechanisms and practices of control, and the ideas underlying these mechanisms create structural predispositions towards order and conflict. To the extent that these mechanisms work automatically and provide participants with very little potential for (self) control, we may speak of a structural state of 'domination' in the organisation. The ultimate form of domination is the right of employers to terminate employment. Where order is predisposed by consent-generating techniques of persuasion - which typify many aspects of the technology of organisational control that reflects the prevailing human-relations ideology of British management with its emphasis, for example, on greater self-control, responsibility etc. - it is possible to speak of structurally-predisposed hegemony.<sup>17</sup> Devoid of political rhetoric, Nichols and Beynon's (1977) report on Chemco's New Working Arrangement emphasises the latter's actual, economic rationality which, in order to produce consent, was clothed in human relations verbage :

"The trick, and the problem, which faced Chemco was to socialise production the capitalist way: to bring about a capitalist socialisation. Workers were to be invited to get more 'involved' in their work, to 'self-actualise' and actually to be more exploited". (Nichols and Beynon, 1977, p.10; see also pp.72-73).

Thus a structural arrangement which was above all economically rational was introduced to increase control and organisational order by consent. This is evidently also the reasoning behind multifarious participatory schemes, as Brannen et al. (1976) indicate in the case of British Steel.

Structural order, then, has two interrelated aspects: 'hegemony' which involves such a degree of ideological dominance as to reflect "genuine" consensus with the way the system works: and 'domination' wherein the facts of organisational life starkly constrain the lives of participants. Gramsci's insight about the

historical inter-relationship of these two states is as relevant to the understanding of organisational power and politics as it is to national power and politics. As Gramsci observed, the structural facts and logic of capitalism may be relatively constant, but economic-historical factors - themselves part of what Marx might call the immanent logic of capital - alter the ways in which the structural framework imposes itself upon social and organisational life. Gramsci came to understand that the order of Western capitalist society had increasingly become based upon hegemony as the "normal form of control" (cf. Williams, 1960, p.591; Femia, 1975, p.31), because the system could normally supply the wealth necessary as a basis for generating consent. In times of economic strength, the facts of capitalist society can be made less obviously constraining; when profitability in the market is certain and predictable, the logic of the system is not immediately compelling and organisational life is often cushioned from the "harsh" facts.

However, those same facts become at once more compelling and coercive for both management and workers when economic depression sets in. Rising prices, higher costs, lower demand, lower profits and unemployment are also part of the structural facts of life, as Britain has experienced during the 1970's. These facts have instant effects on the lives of all participants (and ex-participants) who feel the belt of organisational rationality tightening. As the structural framework becomes revealed in all its immediacy and starkness, and the ranges of opportunities decrease and of constraints increase, 'domination' becomes the prevailing mode of creating order.

Obviously at any given time, the structural framework of organisational power will involve both hegemonic predispositions towards order, as ideological procedures and practices within the organisation operate towards the creation of consent for organisational rationality; and biases towards order generated by the constraining facts of the control system. The societal-instit-

utional logic and the local-organisational rationalities are conducive to a state of organisational order because they anonymously predispose social action by the alternative modes of ideological persuasion and social constraint. The former mode, with its basis in legitimacy and consent is stable in the longer term, but its existence cannot be assumed or taken as self-evident.

"System integration" thus stresses the possibility of "institutionalising" order and control with reference to both ideologies (norms, values) and coercion (cf. Lockwood, 1964), but the structural framework may also be conducive to conflict or disintegration. As Clements (1977) suggests of pluralism, there is a mistaken tendency to

"... assume the existence of social structures free from internal contradictions." (Clements, 1977, p.312).

The argument that the way the system works itself produces 'logical inconsistencies' which may result in social conflict is of course to return once more to classical Marxian analysis and the relevance of the latter is particularly important in a discussion of industrial organisations in Britain. The contradictions which arise in the structural framework of capitalism, by virtue of its logic, create external, 'objective' tendencies towards conflict between social groups within the organisation (cf. Hyman, 1972, p.83ff.). Lockwood (1964) summarises Marx's view of system conflict as arising through :

"... the contradiction between 'forces of production' (technological potential) and the 'relations of production' (property institutions)" (Lockwood, 1964, p.251).

This operational incompatibility becomes a problem for social order when the social conflicts it implies become realised in concrete

social situations, and when the machinery of social order is unable to cope with politically-expressed conflicts.

As with the relationship between any structural pre-disposition and social action, that between system contradiction and social conflict is inevitably contingent :

"Conflict in the sense of active struggle pursued in the context of clashes of interests, is a property of interaction. Contradiction, on the other hand, may be understood as a property of structures, and as standing in contingent relation to conflict. Contradiction can be conceptualised as the opposition between structural 'principles'... "  
(Giddens, 1976, p.125).

I shall be using the terms 'system contradiction' and 'structural conflict' interchangeably, because such an objective inconsistency in institutional logic or organisational rationality, either as ideas or in the form of procedures, rules etc., implies a structural predisposition towards social conflict within the organisation.

Examples of structural conflict in organisational life are well documented, so I shall provide only a few illustrations of the phenomenon. I have already outlined some major features of the structural framework of power in industrial organisations, and, in the context of structural possibilities and impossibilities, I have shown how the logic of capital creates a distinct system of inequalities - especially inequalities of control potential. Systems of stratification, however created, are always the potential focus of tension and conflict because they create differences between groups based upon the ultimately fragile foundation of social assumption. The same institutional logic, as we have seen, produces ideological machinery which operates to elevate assumptions to the status of consensually-defined facts, and, in the last resort, bolsters partially-defined assumptions by coercion; but under certain circumstances, social facts may be de-mystified, coercion resisted,

and system contradiction translated into social conflict. (Beynon, 1973, p.103).

Dahrendorf (1959) has argued that organised life in industrial society depends upon the differential allocation of authority, and that such inequalities, grounded in organisational rationality, mean that (latent) conflict is endemic to the system. Marx was the first to analyse a further contradiction based upon the very logic of capitalist organisation viz. that factory work life generates the need for cooperation between workers, and between management and the workers, but the point and purpose of such life leads simultaneously to an 'objective' conflict of interests. The system contradiction between cooperation and conflict in industrial organisation has been examined in a number of places by Beynon (1973, e.g. p.159).

It seems, then, that whereas the initial and manifest thrust of the structural framework of industrial organisations is towards organisational order, examination of the social implications of that economic rationality reveals points of system contradiction. The ideology of British society stresses individual freedom and self-determination and yet the reality of organisational life for most participants is one of limited structural possibilities. When circumstances permit, it is possible for workers to increase their control, and in doing so, they themselves adjust the 'objective' reality of organisational life, and thus partially conceal the contradictions which are structurally conducive to social conflict. These contradictions are most likely to become apparent and open to discussion and dispute where 'domination' is the prevalent mode of structural order, where the logic of capitalism is at its clearest. Hence while job controls may be politically accomplished with the consequences of reducing the structural potentiality for conflict, the

"... extent and durability of job controls are subject to the market. Fluctuations in the sales of cars, in the rate of capital investment, soon reveal

themselves on the shop floor" (Beynon, 1973, pp.132-133; see also Lane, 1974, pp.205-206).

When control possibilities are reduced, and hard earned discretion is eroded - at last resort when unemployment becomes a fact of life - structural conflicts become more liable to *social* manifestation.

In this section, I have attempted to demonstrate how organisational order and conflict may be predisposed by the historically conditioned structural framework which circumscribes organisational behaviour. More specifically the integration of organisations subject to the logic of capitalism may take the two analytic and historical forms of hegemony and domination, but the same logic may at the same time set up predispositions towards conflict.

#### 7.5 A Clarificatory Note on Trade Unions

In the above discussion, I have focused, for illustrative purposes, upon industrial organisations, and attempted to show that their structural framework has a general institutional logic and organisational rationality, which predisposes the process of organisational politics before power is exercised in concrete arenas. One of the problems with such an illustrative discussion is that it is impossible to do justice to the complex nature of the structural biases that circumscribe organisational power. A particularly important example of this problem - important enough to require this brief note of clarification - is that of the effect of trade unions on the structural framework of industrial organisations in Britain. This somewhat cursory reference to trade union organisation simultaneously permits further illustration of the basic ideas under examination.

Trade union organisation interlaces with industrial organisation, and the important question of relevance here concerns the extent to which the former's involvement affects the structural

framework of power in the latter. For all participants in industrial organisation, trade unions are part of the given structural facts of life. It might be supposed that trade unions *qua* organised labour (i.e. representing labour and deriving their power from the social solidarity of labour) not only act as focal points of structural conflict but also aim to increase the social possibilities of its membership. From one viewpoint there is some truth in this supposition, but from the point of view of understanding the impact of trade unions on the structural framework of industrial organisations, it is important to understand their structural, institutionalised role in the state of organisational order.

As well as being part of the structural facts of life in industrial organisations, trade unions themselves are circumscribed by their own structural framework, and the institutional logic and premises which rationalise their existence and function are in essence the same as those already examined in 7.2 (cf. Hyman and Fryer, 1977, p.153ff.). As organised labour, trade unions are in opposition to the logic of capital, but, paradoxically, their institutionalised function incorporates them within that very logic :

"... trade unions are dialectically both an opposition to capitalism and a component of it... As institutions, trade unions do not *challenge* the existence of society based on a division of classes, they merely express it ... by their nature they are tied to capitalism". (Anderson, 1977, p.334; cf. Beynon, 1973, pp.220-221; Lane, 1974, p.230ff.).

Having an institutionalised bargaining role, unions act within rules and procedures laid down at societal and local organisational levels, and to be a *bona fide* trade union involves accepting (and implicitly reinforcing) the biases of the structural framework :

"The plain fact is that union action is limited by the system unions have to operate in and is tempered by the values of that system" (Allen, 1966, p.13).

Needless to say, acceptance of the rules and procedures (and, by inference, the institutional logic underlying them) also *enables* certain union actions at the same time (above all, the fundamental possibility of representing members).

The structural framework of trade unions at the same time predisposes the way in which they influence the nature of power in industrial organisations. In this context, trade unions are party to the institutionalised industrial relations procedures, which express the basic values of the system (e.g. adherence to agreed rules, negotiation, compromise etc.) and through which (potential) organisational conflict is channelled. Incorporated within the industrial relations system - the only way they can represent members' interests against capital - unions become subject to the facts of capitalism which they oppose but upon which their existence depends. By accepting the values of the system, and reducing societal (class) issues to organisational (work) issues; by limiting organisational issues to economic ones (cf. Mann, 1973, p.20ff.; Beynon, 1973, pp.230-231 and 299-300) subject to bargaining within institutionalised rules and procedures; by encouraging restricted economic issues to be understood as sectionalist disputes instead of as collective problems; in these ways unions de-focus structural conflict and play an essential role in realisation of structural order in industrial organisations (cf. Lane, 1974, p.179ff.; Hyman, 1972, p.72ff.).

Institutionally, then, trade unions contribute to the structural predispositions towards organisational order, but it might also be argued that they rarely increase the control possibilities of their members. First, by its very implication in the values of the industrial relations system, a trade union tends to reduce its scope *primarily* to economic issues. However, even where

a union does show interest in control possibilities (i.e. in matters of job regulation), it:

"... is essentially conservative - it seems to establish *de jure* what has already occurred *de facto*, namely that workers in their relations with shop floor management are able, informally and surreptitiously, to increase the scope of their activities by being in physical possession of the shopfloor. It is very rarely that a trade union is oriented towards an increase in *actual* job control..." (Mann, 1973, p.20).

Furthermore :

"With the increasing trend towards productivity bargaining, job control is viewed by trade unions as something which can be exchanged periodically for economic rewards" (ibid., p.21).

The lack of priority given by unions to extending job regulation, means that they tend not to create greater structural possibilities for their membership.

The second implication of institutionalised trade unionism for control possibilities lies in the increasing centralisation of industrial relations procedures. Bound up in the economic logic of industrial organisation - of the accumulation and concentration of capital in larger units of production - trade unions have become increasingly involved in national-level negotiations. The centralising of negotiations between full time trade union officials and specialist managers has a tendency of taking bargaining away from the shop-floor, thus restricting the amount of discretion that could be achieved. Often such centralisation occurs on paper only (cf. Hyman and Fryer, 1977, p.166), but sometimes its implications are more constraining :

"Central to the [New Working Arrangement]... was the establishment of a *national* wage rate... The deal did away with *local* wage negotiations and replaced it with a centralised, national structure... The stress in this part of the agreement was upon the isolation of local shop-floor organisations from the collective bargaining process" (Nichols and Beynon, 1977, p.112).

This trade union acknowledgement of and participation in the "corporate rationality" (ibid. p.133) of institutional procedures add to the weight of structural impossibilities, by taking control potential out of the organisational arena.

The shop steward, as representative of the trade union on the shop floor, may on the one hand be freer than the full-time official to evade the structural constraints operating on trade union action, and as such be party to the social practices of job-control (cf. Beynon, 1973, p.129ff. and p.299ff.); on the other hand, unlike the full-time official, shop stewards are directly subject to the same structural predispositions as all shop floor workers. Although shop stewards are distinct in their power base, ultimately they have to live with the rationality of profitability and the market, and this constitutes one basic fact of life in an industrial organisation:

"... the general fact that to work in a factory is to work on management's terms. Where management finds that its right to manage is being challenged within a factory, it is involved in a political struggle. Often this struggle takes the form of skirmishes on the shop floor, and at this level shop steward organisations can be extremely effective, and shop stewards can amass a considerable amount of political influence and personal prestige. Where the challenge to managerial authority seriously affects the profitability of the Company, however, the response

of management is likely to be firmer. To lay men off or to close plants down permanently, ultimately involves political decisions, and it is at this level that the conflict between capital and labour becomes obviously biased against the worker" (Beynon, 1973, p.183).

The shop steward is basically a worker, and in the last resort, where organisational rationality is contravened, structural possibilities for control are governed by his membership of the industrial organisation, rather than the trade union. (See also Lane, 1974, p.195ff. and specifically p.214).

To summarise, the place of trade unions in the structural framework of power in industrial organisations does not fundamentally alter the direction of the structural biases because, in the end, trade union organisations, and their participants, are subject to the same core institutional assumptions and logic which underpins capitalist society. This means that the *social* commitment to opposition, conflict and labour power, in normal circumstances becomes a *structural* involvement in consensus, order and the power of capital.<sup>18</sup> Having said this, it is important to realise that there are limitations to the institutionalisation of industrial conflict, and the aforementioned structural involvement (cf. Hyman, 1972, pp.104-105).

#### Concluding Remarks

Organisational power and politics are circumscribed by the context in which they occur, so that it has been necessary to consider theoretically the nature of this context and of its influence upon the topic. Having accepted the broad, critical themes of the 'two faces of power' thesis, the basic task has been to formulate a sensitising conception of the 'second face' without contravening the theoretical and methodological premises of the thesis. I have argued for a notion of 'structural framework' and have explored its features both in abstract and by illustration.

The structural framework, as impersonal, anonymous tendencies that inhere in the institutional arrangements of society and organisation, predisposes the possibilities and impossibilities of actors, and is conducive to order and conflict. These propositions have been developed in the specific context of power in industrial organisations in Britain.

It is in the nature of organisation that biases are structured into the initial potentials and capacities of actors independent of what the latter do. However these structural biases are not sufficient to explain the processes of political action and interaction which are part of the everyday lives of organisational participants. It is essential to know how participants themselves make sense of these limitations and opportunities if we are to *explain* organisational politics, for it is always after their own interpretive work that participants engage in the courses of political action observed. In the next two chapters, I shall focus on the interpretive activities of actors in organisations and show how they intermediate between the "structural facts of life" and organisational politics.

NOTES

1. In Chapter Nine, I shall take up the distinctions between social and structural context, and between political action and political process.
2. Glucksmann (1974, chapter 2) conducts a restricted survey, but only touches upon the variety of meaning and breadth of scope of the concept. Clarke (1975, p.144ff.) is more interested in the theoretical possibilities of the concept of 'structure'.
3. The abstract aspects of this conception correspond generally with the notion of 'structure' in structural linguistics, Levi-Straussian and Althusserian structuralism :  

"Thus 'structure' refers not to observed social relations but to a more abstract level of reality, and is the syntax of transformation which is present only in its manifestations but can never be observed as such in itself ... It refers to the more abstract principles governing the organisation of social relations". (Glucksmann, 1974, p.45).
4. In a more specific context, Baldamus (1961, p.17) makes a similar distinction.
5. More specifically, I am thinking of Beynon (1973), Clegg (1975), Nichols and Armstrong (1976) and Nichols and Beynon (1977). Apart from Clegg, these studies are mainly empirical in focus, in spite of being underpinned by a general Marxist viewpoint. For this reason they were not included in Part One.  

The restriction of discussion to *British* society is a reflection of this choice of research studies, although it might be argued that the general propositions are relevant to all Western capitalist societies (cf. Miliband, 1973b).
6. Baldamus (1961, p.32-43) distinguishes two types of control of work behaviour (effort) within an industrial organisation viz. "effort stability" and "effort intensity". Being more general, my arguments will not follow up the possible implications of such control differences.
7. The latter are themselves held accountable to others according to their performance on economically-rational criteria (cf. Nichols and Beynon, 1977, pp.38-39). See also below on the calculability of control criteria.

8. For example, Kynaston Reeves and Woodward write :
- "A feature of impersonal controls is that they operate more or less impartially and more or less automatically". (Kynaston Reeves and Woodward, 1970, p.45).
9. Accounting theory and practice can, of course, be constructed upon different premises and thus be 'rational' on different grounds. Weber (1964, p.195) sees capital accounting as formally rational where profit-making in market situations provides the structural context. But accountability may also be assessed with respect to different "ultimate values" (cf. Weber's notion of substantive rationality, 1964, p.184ff.) e.g. "the social needs of the community" (Coates and Topham, 1974, p.112). *Within* a capitalist context, this has given rise to the social audit and social accounting whereby actions are held accountable to user-groups other than capital e.g. labour, customers, local community.
10. For discussion of further, less visible workplace inequalities in organisational rewards, see Wedderburn, 1969; 1970; Wedderburn and Craig, 1974.
11. The Chemco studies (Nichols and Armstrong, 1976; Nichols and Beynon, 1977) document the development of new, "progressive" techniques. The New Working Arrangement, although enveloped in a humanising philosophy, was effectively aimed at tightening the control possibilities for workers, supervisors and managers alike.
12. For now classic arguments about variations in control and discretion of workers *between* industrial settings, see Blauner, 1964.
13. For example, Marx was particularly interested in the capitalist: Nichols and Beynon (1977, p.44ff.) have discussed the structural influences on the supervisor; Beynon (1973, e.g. p.220) analyses the position of the shop steward in a similar way; Lockwood (1958, p.41ff.) is concerned with the office clerk, and Mills (1951) examines a number of middle class occupations.
- In concentrating on the categories of managers and workers (i.e. those with and without institutional authority) for the purposes of theoretical discussion, I am more or less following sociological conventions (see, for example, Dahrendorf, 1959, p.165ff.; Martin, 1977, p.102ff.)
14. On rationalisation and the increasingly impersonal control of clerical office work, see Lockwood, 1958, p.85ff. and Mills, 1951, p.192ff.

15. The realisation of career possibilities, as Dalton and Burns suggest, thus become the focus of managerial politics. See Chapter Nine.
16. For career possibilities of clerks, see Lockwood, 1958, p.57ff. and Mills, 1951, pp.274-275.
17. It would seem that Clegg (1975; 1977) has conflated these two structural modes of organisation, although *his* discussion of 'domination' seems to reflect more Gramsci's idea of 'hegemony' (see 4.3).
18. For an insightful discussion of how structural pressures influence the social activities and oppositional rhetoric of shop stewards and trade union leaders, see Lane, 1974, Chapters Six and Seven.

EVERYDAY ORGANISATIONAL THEORISING : INTERPRETIVE ASPECTS

8.1 Organisational Politics and the Structural Framework  
of Power

In both the Marxist and the non-Marxist traditions of social science, a perennial concern has been the relationship between social action and social structure. At the root of this matter lies the question: how, and to what extent do the objective (social, economic, political) conditions of society influence the subjective consciousness of individuals (in groups) so that the latter behave in the ways observed? The nature of the relationship between organisational politics and the structural framework of organisational power raises the same issues as those that have troubled social scientists of diverse persuasions. My approach to this relationship is to build a view upon the theoretical efficacy of the postulate of voluntarism and to eschew the neat but contradictory dichotomies that are to be found so frequently in the literature. *In everyday organisational life*, people cannot sit back and philosophise about the strange contradictoriness of choice and constraint, action and structure, subjectivity and objectivity etc. - they simply experience such polarities (maybe not as polarities at all) and contrive their sensibility for the purposes at hand.

"... 'we are not free to choose' 'to view and hence to construct' the world in any old way. Rather the experience of social structure, which we embody in our social relations and our language, leads us to expect certain material constraints in any social world; but, of course, these contradictory opposites *are* unified because they have to be lived".  
(Corrigan, 1975, p.222).

By examining how participants experience and respond to the structural framework that circumscribes the organisation *qua* political arena, the dichotomies, contradictions, opposites which permeate academic theorising become academically understandable.

In organisations, power is exercised, control attempted, in the context of structural pulls and pushes which inhere in the dominant ways of 'doing' organisation. The structural predispositions, while grounded in a more or less stable set of assumptions and mode of rationality, are subject to variations in their implications for organisational politics because of changes in historical-economic factors - in Chapter Seven structural order and conflict were seen as variable. However, structural factors are not the only significant theoretical variables; 'objective', structuralist analysis has shown itself to be generally incapable of explaining observed actions with any accuracy (cf. Wolpe, 1970; Maravell, 1976). Simultaneous variation in the ways organisational participants interpret and attempt to exercise control (for themselves, for groups, for their organisation) over their work situations, leads to a highly complex picture of multiple objective and subjective factors. I have written in some detail about the structural side of organisational power, so, in the next two chapters I wish to investigate power and politics from the participants' viewpoint - the first face. However I shall make clear that the two faces are not independent of each other.

It is in the interpretive and strategic work of organisational participants that the political life of organisations becomes apparent: in the creation, expansion and exploitation of possibilities; in the avoidance, reduction and changing of impossibilities; and in the unintended, cumulative repercussions of these conscious efforts to control work. I shall be arguing that the significant variable in question is the ways in which participants *theorise* their everyday organisational lives. The ways in which they make sense of the organisational "facts of life" (i.e. interpretive work) will further, for those participants with an active interest controlling their work situations, be related to

their attempts to handle those "facts" (i.e. strategic work). For the purposes of discussion I shall therefore distinguish interpretive from strategic aspects of everyday organisational theorising.

Interpretive work refers to the attempts by actors to make sense of their organisational and social experiences so that they are able to make their lives "reasonable" and "accountable". Strategic work implies a conscious, planning of future courses of action based upon one's current understanding (possibly 'false') of what is possible and desirable.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, while all organisational participants will perform, consciously or otherwise, interpretive work, some proportion of them will actively seek to expand possibilities of action or to reduce social/structural impossibilities. Where organisational participants are conscious control strategists - and I suspect that most are *at some level* - they will be considered as political actors. For the most part, I shall discuss interpretive aspects of everyday organisational theorising in the present chapter, and the strategic aspects in Chapter Nine.

Before moving on to the more substantive arguments, I think that it is necessary to enter a caveat. This arises in part from the language which I have been using to describe theorising activities. It is important to understand how participants give meaning to their organisational lives, and how they interpret political aspects of their work situations, but interpretive work should not be envisaged as self-creating and self-sustaining. Sociological *explanation* can only take place at the juncture between structure and action (i.e. theorising), but it is both naive and unhelpful to study theorising as a socially detached activity :

"Man's consciousness does have a certain independence from ... structural factors ... [but it] is not wholly autonomous. Definitions of reality are themselves socially generated and sustained, and the ability of men to achieve their goals is

constrained [and, one might add, facilitated -  
E.D.C.] by the objective characteristics of the  
situation". (Hyman, 1972, p.72).

Everyday organisational theorising constitutes the starting point for explaining political actions in organisations, but it is an encumbrance to understanding the latter if such theorising is seen only as a feature of the immediate occasion of its use - as is definitional of ethnomethodological investigation and implicit in much symbolic interactionism.

Everyday organisational theorising, at any given point in time, reveals a social-historical process in which 'experience' meets 'facts' and endeavours to rationalise them. Theories-in-use therefore "know" or "have known" the structural world of organisational reality, and provide their user with concepts and propositions that are more-or-less well tested. Theorising activities thus *already* embody a vision of the structural framework distilled from their continuing interface with the latter. Everyday organisational theories will invariably reflect, though not uniformly nor necessarily consistently or accurately, experiences of the localised structural framework, its procedures, rules, practices as well as its ideas and rationality; they will also incorporate broader experiences of the institutional facts and ideas which give reason to organisational activities. Experiences of ideology and of 'factual' reality, at the localised organisational and the institutional societal levels, will influence in complicated ways the interpretive and strategic work of participants in the political arena of the organisation.

The nature of these experiential sedimentations and distillations of the system *qua* fact and *qua* ideology imply complex (Marxists might prefer the term 'dialectical') interrelationships between the structural framework and politics, between organisational and extra-organisational life, and between everyday theorising and ideology. In turn, this means that the concept of "organisational politics" necessarily opens up broader issues about the social and

cultural sources of everyday theories of organisational power and politics, and to neglect these broader sociological matters is inevitably to shortcircuit an understanding of the topic in question.

In the following discussion I hope to demonstrate that everyday organisational theorising - in both its aspects - is grounded, in a variable and contingent way, in the structural framework of organisational power, and that such activities can and should be comprehended not only in organisational terms but also in societal terms. As in Chapter Seven, much of the discussion will focus on power and politics in industrial organisations in capitalist societies - particularly Britain.

## 8.2 Theorising: Awareness and Political Strategy

Theorising - of academic or of everyday varieties - serves a number of functions stemming from its basic aim, i.e. to make rational and accountable for the theorist his observations and experiences. In considering the matter of organisational politics, two of these functions appear to have special importance viz. providing a general *awareness* or image of social existence, and establishing a basis of 'knowledge' from which future plans or projects may be deduced and enacted.

Social actors behave in accordance with their awareness of the situations faced, and this awareness or consciousness will involve an interpretive assessment of the way the system works, of their social possibilities and impossibilities, of the obduracy of the system etc. 'Awareness' itself is of course a variable factor, which is rooted in the type of theory being employed - some theories will encourage or permit a greater *degree of awareness*, while others will tend to restrict the awareness in some way. A second dimension of awareness refers to the *type of awareness* produced by the theory in question - different theories will focus on different aspects of social life and therefore may produce an equal degree of awareness of opposing "sides" of reality.

Considering degree of awareness first, it seems possible to distinguish two related matters - the *completeness* of the image(s) produced by a theory, and the *commitment* which a theory invokes. Theories may create a high degree of awareness by constructing a more-or-less complete picture of the structural framework and the ways in which it 'reacts' to social actions. To this extent, theorists are in a position to interpret and rationalise most of all of their experiences.<sup>2</sup> Other theories will be limited in their scope of application and thereby provide only a restricted or partial awareness of the "nature of things".

Where everyday theories create relatively complete closed world-views - i.e. internally consistent views about the (possible) nature of the social (or organisational) world - I shall call them 'ideological'. This has the added implication that complete world-views will tend to induce a greater degree of commitment than would be true of incomplete, open, non-ideological theories. Indeed, completeness and commitment are mutually reinforcing to the extent that complete images will tend to create greater adherence because of their 'success'; and intellectual and emotional attachment will tend to make adherents blind to any weaknesses or loopholes. Completeness, 'success' and commitment thus tend to engender a certain resistance to "antithetical" experiences, while non-ideological theories will tend to lead to flexible, uncommitted interpretations adapting to inconsistent experiences.

The distinction between ideological and non-ideological theories shows fundamental similarities to that between 'closed' and 'open' academic theories (see Chapter Five) for obvious reasons.

Two theories may be equally complete, invoke similar levels of commitment and similar degrees of awareness, and yet, by providing a different *type* of awareness, they may have entirely different implications for power and political action. Awareness may vary in its understanding of how the system works or should work, of how the structural framework interacts with social life,

of the possibilities and impossibilities for socio-political actions etc. However, in general, I would suggest that everyday organisational theorising may involve an awareness that is either oriented towards organisational order (i.e. acceptance of the structural framework *as it is* or oriented towards conflict (i.e. opposition to the structural framework *as it is*). Clearly, order and conflict awareness are critical factors in the analysis of how actors theorise power and politics in organisational life.

Concerning political action, it is necessary to examine how participants translate their interpretive understanding of the organisation into active plans to control their organisational lives. In Chapter Nine, I shall be arguing that these plans of action, or political strategies, are also related to the degree and type of awareness created by the theorising activities of organisational participants. Such political strategies, necessarily implicating other actors in the intricacies of integration and conflict, are central to the analysis of organisational politics.

In the rest of this chapter I shall examine some major "modes of theorising" and the images that they produce for their adherents. I shall also consider some of the complications that arise from the fact that organisational participants are in general "inconsistent" theorists. Throughout this discussion, I shall consciously link *organisational* theorising with actors' experiences of the structural framework in its localised and institutional, 'factual' and 'ideological' aspects. These arguments are carried forward into Chapter Nine, where the political-strategic implications of everyday organisational theorising are developed.

### 8.3 Modes of Everyday Organisational Theorising

The argument that organisational participants employ 'theories', not unlike academic ones, in order to impute order and reason to their daily experiences is not particularly

contentious. Such everyday theories may be relatively inarticulate, maybe inarticulable, but people do tend to develop patterned ways of perceiving social reality - that this happens in spite of sociologists' organised and comprehensive attempts to sabotage any 'inherent' orderliness in reality, is one of ethnomethodology's major contributions to social scientific knowledge. There are two main problems which need attention because they underscore the actual complexities of the apparently simple proposition with which I opened this section. These problems, which I shall call the *variability* and *inconsistency* of everyday theorising, refer respectively to an empirical and a theoretical issue. Inconsistent theorising arises when actors employ diverse and (apparently) incompatible theories in their organisational lives - I shall return to this matter in section 8.6 below, after having explained some of the modes of theorising available.

The problem of variability is, in a sense, more serious because, in a theoretical thesis, it can only be "resolved" by assumption. The number of particular theories used in everyday life is potentially infinite, and each theory will have some implications for the political conduct of its adherents. It is important to be theoretically sensitive to these variations:

"To neglect the possibilities of variation in perceptions and definitions, goals and motives, is to trammel sociological analysis". (Hyman, 1972, p.69).

Yet in the present context to discuss everyday organisational theorising meaningfully requires a bit of "tramelling": variability of theories needs to be reduced analytically. As such, using the arguments in 8.2, I suggest that, for the purposes of studying organisational politics, the general range of such theories may be established - from 'ideological' 'order' theories to 'ideological' 'conflict' theories - and *four* basic "*modes of theorising*" may be identified within that range.

A "mode of theorising" may incorporate any number of concrete everyday theories, but the latter belong to the mode in question because they share certain general characteristics concerning degree and type of awareness. These modes of theorising are distinct for explanatory purposes, but are not necessarily mutually exclusive - in fact in section 8.6 I shall suggest that it is perfectly rational for participants to use (elements of) more than one mode, and to shift between them. Furthermore, these modes of theorising are not randomly distributed amongst the organisational personnel, since their appropriateness to organisational and extra-organisational experiences varies.

Figure 8.1      Four Modes of Everyday Organisational Theorising

		Types of Awareness	
		'Order' Awareness (Acceptance)	'Conflict' Awareness (Rejection)
Degree of awareness (completeness and commitment)	High (ideology)	Normative Theorising	Alternative Theorising
	Low (non-ideology)	Pragmatic Theorising	Oppositional Theorising

In terms of the sensitising themes of the thesis, everyday organisational theories can be classified according to the awareness they reflect and promote of organisational order and conflict, and to their completeness and the commitment they generate. Figure 8.1 summarises this relationship. It should be remembered that these four modes are not intended to be analytically distinct, although discussion of them in the following sections may at times give this impression. Before coming to a documented explication (sections 8.4 and 8.5) I shall briefly outline the main characteristics of each mode.

The central feature of 'normative theorising' in organisational life is its acceptance of the structural framework (in both its local and institutional aspects) as socially legitimate. Such profound acceptance of the way things work will thereby influence actors' responses to the system (e.g. institutional authority tends to become transformed into normative authority) creating active support for the organisation and its definitions. Normative theorising implies a degree of commitment which is liable to invoke conscious efforts to maintain organisational order by adopting strategies which appeal to cooperation, harmony, loyalty etc., reflecting the actor's assessment of the structural framework as socially legitimate.

The second mode of theorising, which I have called 'pragmatic' is unlike the first in that it involves little depth of awareness about how organisations work, and barely a commitment to anything - save, perhaps, survival. Without contemplation of the 'whys' and 'wherefores' of the structural framework in general, attention is focused on localised, immediate issues that affect day-to-day existence. Pragmatic theorising thus connotes neither promotion nor rebuttal of the institutional logic, and, being neither for nor against, implicitly favours organisational order. Being confronted with unalterable, often unrecognised, facts of life, pragmatic theorists opt to live with them, to "ride the waves", making sense of their experiences on a daily basis. This 'unideological' mode, responding to and coping with issues as they arise, will tend to be associated with strategies that appear apathetic or indifferent, usually being piecemeal and disconnected. Although such theorising does not positively endorse the status quo - under certain circumstances, it may lead to pressure for localised change - the general tenor of the pragmatic mode and related strategies is acceptance by default.

In contrast to the above modes, alternative and oppositional theorising, either consciously or potentially, operate in the direction of conflict and rejection. Oppositional theorising implies a questioning of the status quo and its legitimacy, but

this questioning is restricted to localised issues rather than being generalised to the institutional basis of the organisation - its rationality. The incomplete, unideological nature of such theorising leads neither to a systematic understanding of why things are "wrong", nor, therefore, to a high degree of awareness of how to resolve the conflicts for good. Low commitment to change, and the restricted scope of theorising leads to the development of piecemeal strategies oriented to the elimination, by opposition and resistance, of finite problems as they arise. In spite of an implicit embryonic awareness of the social contingency of the structural framework, limited, unorganised strategies of opposition will, by themselves, tend to be channeled within the system.

The alternative mode of theorising<sup>3</sup> shares with its normative counterpart a high degree of awareness, and with oppositional theories an orientation towards conflict and change. The defining characteristic of alternative theorising is adherence to a different set of premises and logic as a basis for assessing social life. Its rejection of the existing structural framework thus follows from a thoroughgoing analysis of the latter's rationality combined with an explicit understanding of its social contingency. Defining conflict as an inevitable precursor to the establishment of an alternative way of organising work, and supported by high commitment to change, alternative theorists are likely to adopt political strategies of a militant, organised nature.

In sections 8.4 and 8.5, I shall examine these modes of theorising in the context of other studies in order to illustrate their usefulness, and to indicate the theoretical need to see everyday organisational theorising in the context of the structural framework of power.

#### 8.4 Everyday Organisational Theorising and Organisational Order

In the remaining sections of Chapter Eight, I shall be liberally drawing upon available sociological research which relates directly and indirectly to the various ways in which participants perceive and define their organisations as political arenas. The materials will be organised for two purposes: first, to illustrate the potential usefulness of the categories introduced above; second, to illuminate the relationship of theorising activities to experience, both within *and outwith* the organisation. In respect of the latter point, although the aim of this thesis is to develop an interpretive approach to *internal* organisational politics, social reality is not so easily compartmentalised. Indeed the following arguments reference this resistance to *simpliste* discussions of organisational politics *per se* by demonstrating the reciprocal nature of experience, theorising and consciousness inside and outside organisations.

Before moving to an exploration of 'order theorising', I need to raise, but not resolve, a theoretical problem. In the following paragraphs I shall be illustrating my arguments with reference to 'class-images', 'meaning-systems', 'social consciousness', 'modes of adaptation' (and other more diffuse but parallel conceptions), but at the same time it is necessary to accept these terms fairly unquestioningly. There are *intuitive* overlaps and similarities which defy explicit analytical clarification even were the time and space available. Because work in this area has been, and still is, subject to continuous debate and criticism - the main thrusts of which will become apparent below - I shall be invoking these conceptions for illustrative and illuminative purposes only, in order to suggest lines of enquiry into the nature of everyday organisational theorising and its social and ideological sources.

#### 8.4.1 Normative Theorising

Discussion of the normative mode immediately opens up the question of the relationships between theorising and organisational position on the one hand, and between theorising and social (class) values on the other. Accepting that very few participants will adopt the normative mode to the exclusion of all others, documentary evidence would suggest that normative theorising permeates more fully the interpretive work of higher participants in organisational and class terms.

Parkin writes of the 'dominant value system' which reinforces the structural framework of society by providing :

"... a moral framework which promotes the endorsement of existing inequality"  
(Parkin, 1972, p.81).

Dominant values "naturally" inform the mode of theorising employed by those participants whose "objective interests" (cf. Balbus, 1971, p.152ff.) are directly tied to the way things are i.e. the higher social classes/occupational groups who benefit from and through the institutional premises of society. In capitalist society, employers, executives and share-holding managers appear to approach most closely this natural affinity with the dominant ideology (cf. Burns, 1977, pp.109-110; Brannen et al., 1976, p.43). Mills (1951, Part One) discusses at length the "old middle classes" and the "rhetoric of competition" in the U.S., and, with respect to industrial organisations in Britain, Fox's classic analyses of the "unitary" and "pluralistic" ideologies of management (1966; 1973; 1974a; 1974b) demonstrate the application of dominant social values in the organisational theorising of that group. In non-industrial organisations too top participants theorise their organisational existence in the belief that all participants are bound together in a moral order which legitimates fully the status quo (cf. Burns, 1977, p.84).

In spite of this "natural" association of certain higher participants to normative theorising, it should be assumed neither that all such participants employ such a mode all the time, nor that some lower participants do not identify with the structural framework to a significant extent. Indeed the latter question is more interesting theoretically and this has been reflected in the amount of research devoted to it. Sociologists who have examined class attitudes towards the status quo provide evidence for two major normative theories in use.

The first of these theories may be called "aspirational" (Parkin, 1972, pp.86-87). The white-collar, lower middle worker class is probably archetypal of normative identification which arises through his valued social association with or proximity to higher organisational groups. This association, more historical than current, creates the upward-looking clerk who emphasises his future promotion possibilities and thus accepts the system which he believes will fulfil his aspirations. In spite of the reduction in the real career possibilities of clerks - albeit higher than shopfloor workers - the latter's individualistic, future-looking status consciousness is congruent with high job commitment and a positive evaluation of the organisational order (see Lockwood, 1958, p.68 and p.201ff.; Mills, 1951, p.259ff.; Dahrendorf, 1969, pp.147-148; also Burns' discussion of vocational commitment, 1977, p.112ff.).

Lockwood's conception of the "traditional deferential worker" (1966, p.252ff.) provides some illustration of a second type of normative theorising "from below". Deferential theorising also involves a status consciousness but the images of society and work suggest a socially legitimate acceptance of the structural framework in itself, rather than for its reward system. As with other types of theorising, research on deference indicates that the images associated with it tend to intermingle with images more akin to other modes (cf. Bell and Newby, 1975; Martin and Fryer, 1975; Batstone, 1975) - this point is germane to the arguments developed in section 8.6 below - but the proposition that elements

of deferential theorising are found amongst workers, and influence their interpretation of organisational power, in supportive of the present view.

Evidence of normative theories in use also comes from organisational studies. Nichols' work (1974; also Nichols and Armstrong, 1976, p.130ff.) indicates that under certain circumstances foremen, with "hard", Northern working-class backgrounds, make sense of parts of their work (and social) experiences by expressing explicit support for the status quo :

"Within their knowledge of what is possible, the company has done them well. Ask them about shareholders, profit or capitalism, then, and they will tell you how what *is*, works. For them, the present represents a more or less unalterable order of things".  
(Nichols, 1974, p.493).

The case is not clear-cut; normative ideas coexist with pragmatic and even oppositional ones, but the former are used coherently to interpret certain features of their organisational lives, e.g. strikes, unemployment. As with managers, other professionals, clerks and workers, some foremen are more fully in possession of a normative theory than others; Nichols and Beynon (1977, p.48ff.) thus speaks of "management men" who identify with the goals of top management.

Even among shop stewards, research has revealed elements of normative theorising in varying degrees. Poole (1974, pp.62-63 and 73-74) discovered that almost a quarter of his sample of shop stewards could be considered as "active conciliators" who defined their organisational role in consensus terms (cf. Miller and Form, 1951, p.265ff.; Batstone et al., 1977, p.24ff.). Similarly, Brannen et al's worker-directors also held, or had developed through their boardroom experience, a normative outlook to their organisational lives, in spite of their "traditional proletarian" backgrounds (Brannen et al., 1976, pp.126-128, and pp.164-165).

There would appear to be some documentary support for the normative mode of theorising both in general social life, and in industrial and non-industrial<sup>4</sup> organisations. Normative theorising will rarely constitute the total view of any group or individual, and elements of it can be found in most parts of the organisation, developed to varying degrees of coherence and awareness. Where normative theories are used *to any great extent*, one may expect both commitment to, and often active support for the structural framework (see 9.2).

Identification of full normative theorising may be hampered by two complicating issues: first, normative ideas and propositions may be adopted for pragmatic and strategic reasons, rather than for their own sake - such adoption would indicate the pragmatic mode of theorising (see note 11). Second, normative theories and imagery appear to exist on two distinct levels - the abstract and the concrete - between which, for the purpose of analysis, it is important to distinguish.

Regarding the latter issue, much research indicates that *most* actors will apparently concede social legitimacy to some more general aspects of the dominant ideology and, at an abstract level, will theorise their social and organisational lives normatively. It is one variant of "inconsistent" theorising (section 8.6) that working class people will both socially legitimise the status quo in abstract, but act in accord with other (e.g. pragmatic) theories in concrete situations:

"... members of the subordinate class are constrained to accept the dominant moral framework as an abstract and perhaps somewhat idealised version of reality, although their life conditions tend to weaken its binding force in the actual conduct of affairs."

(Parkin, 1972, pp.94-95).

A general "normative" acceptance of social values (e.g. the importance of ambition) become redefined to make greater sense of real experience (e.g. lack of opportunities) - see also Mann (1970) and Femia (1975, p.46). The existence of normative theorising alongside non-normative theorising illustrates the success of the legitimation machinery in industrial society, but does not indicate a fully-fledged, widespread social consensus (cf. Mann, 1970).

In a few cases, normative theorising serves as a means of interpreting both the abstract and the concrete levels of organisational experience. This may be expected to occur most frequently and fully amongst top managers, executives and higher professionals, whose experiences - ideological and "factual" - are likely to be clearly understandable within such a mode.

Research indicates that "pure" deferential or aspirational theories are unlikely to exist except amongst a small minority of lower participants, but that such theories would act to short-circuit the possible realisation of any ambivalence between local/abstract or factual/ideological experiences. (cf. Martin and Fryer, 1975, p.110ff.; Nichols and Beynon, 1977, p.47ff.).

#### 8.4.2 Pragmatic Theorising

Implicit in the above discussion of the normative mode of "order" theorising, is the possible alternative of understanding organisational power and politics pragmatically :

"...*pragmatic* acceptance is where the individual complies because he perceives no realistic alternative, and *normative* acceptance, where the individual internalises the moral expectations of the ruling class and views his own inferior position as legitimate" (Mann, 1970, p.425).

My notion of pragmatic theorising goes beyond the rather static concept of 'acceptance', to view the interpretive process whereby

such acceptance is forthcoming, and the variety of political forms it may take. An understanding based upon the application of pragmatic theorising will tend to be localised in focus, restricted in scope and directing attention to the problem of coping with immediate matters-in-hand. This mode may well co-exist with a normative understanding of abstract values (as suggested above), but, as a "deviant" (Mann, 1970) or "subordinate" (Parkin, 1972) meaning-system, will tend to apply to the everyday organisational experiences and "accommodate" those experiences within the broader structural framework :

"... that is to say, [the subordinate value-system's] ... representation of the class structure and inequality emphasises various modes of adaptation, rather than either full endorsement of, or opposition to, the *status quo*" (Parkin, 1972, p.88).

At the level of concrete work experience, acceptance will be forthcoming not through belief in the moral rectitude of the system as a set of facts and ideas (indeed, the 'system' may not be perceived as such), but because of an uncommitted need to subsist *in* the system (cf. Brannen et al., 1976, p.33).<sup>5</sup>

The idea of "passive consent" (Femia, 1975, p.34) or "reluctant acceptance" (Parkin, 1972, p.90) stresses one possible form of pragmatic theorising, in which participants simply and apathetically interpret their work lives as uncontrollable, and the structural framework as highly constraining, unalterable facts. At this extreme, pragmatic theorising becomes apolitical in the sense that the "apathetic" acceptance of structural impossibilities implies no strategic attempts to support, change or adapt the system. The case of assembly-line workers is probably the most documented example of such apathy, although, as Beynon has indicated, this stereotype portrait of the car assembler as purely "instrumental" in his theorising (cf. Goldthorpe et al, 1968) has probably been overdrawn. Lockwood's "privatised

worker" with his "pecuniary" model of society and work (Lockwood, 1966, p.256ff.), with his withdrawal from active organisational participation<sup>6</sup>, presumably suggests an extreme form of pragmatism involving adaptation *to* the system rather than adaptation *of* the system. Such fatalism and indifference may result in organisational inaction in a minority of cases, but for the most part does not constitute a satisfactory description of the complexities, shiftings, ambiguities and potentialities of the pragmatic mode in general (cf. Westergaard, 1970; Moorhouse, 1976, p.490ff.).

Lack of moral involvement and acceptance of the structural framework are indicative of pragmatic theorising and are common features of the attitudes and behaviour of participants at all levels of the organisation (e.g. see Beynon, 1973, p.113 and pp.118-119; Blackburn and Mann, 1975, p.155; Nichols and Armstrong, 1976, pp.58-59; Burns, 1977, p.110), but they do not necessarily imply a failure to act, to attempt to grapple with the problems of organisational life at a local level, in a piecemeal fashion. It is probably more accurate to emphasise the complexities and ambiguities involved in pragmatic theorising (section 8.6), and the ways in which participants contrive to "get by", or actively seek to control possibilities in concrete work situations. By conceiving of pragmatic "theorising" as an activity, and relating it to political strategy at the local level (see 9.3), conflicts, ruled insignificant or uninteresting by other approaches (e.g. Clegg, 1975) become important in revealing the political life of the organisation, its relationship to the structural framework, and its future possibilities. Nichols and Armstrong follow this line of argument in considering the large majority of Chemco workers who are relatively inactive :

"These men do not, by any means, all 'say nothing'. Whether they assert themselves, however, depends very much more on the particular situation they find themselves in than is the case with the bloody-minded or the politicals, compared to whom they have a far higher tolerance threshold."  
(Nichols and Armstrong, 1976, p.61).

This lack of involvement in the organisation combined with an uncommitted acceptance of its political order is found at all levels - although most notably perhaps amongst lower participants - and in all organisations. Burns (1977), for example, speaks of professional administrators in a professional organisation :

"What was evident [by 1973] was the more familiar attitude of stoic dedication which senior civil servants in this country have made so very much their own - a cultivated demeanour and mode of expression designed to display a determination to keep the system going at all costs, or to furthering its growth merely because to do so is better than any bearable alternative, and offers the best chance in a deplorable and actively hostile world for the survival of oneself and what one values". (Burns, 1977, p.110).

"Stoic dedication" differs in substance from a subordinate meaning system, but shares some of the characteristics of the pragmatic mode. With respect to total institutions, Goffman (1961, p.64) writes of the opportunistic mode of adaptation he calls 'playing it cool' - a further survival theory (or combination of theories).

Amongst shop stewards also, it is not uncommon to find attitudes towards their tasks which stress a piecemeal, localised understanding of organisational issues, and a similarly uncommitted acceptance of the structural framework. Poole's conception of the "active defensive" stewards whose main duty was to see the lads are "'tret" right' (Poole, 1974, p.62) reflects a form of pragmatic understanding. Some shop stewards accept the nature of their relationship with managers as natural - a "... fact of life as far as their daily dealings were concerned..." (Lane, 1974, pp.213-214) - and interpret organisational power in terms of the practical, given structural framework.

Within the pragmatic mode of theorising there will exist a range of possible interpretive schemes and related strategies. Because it is part of the nature of pragmatism that interpretations will vary according to exigencies, and that theories are incomplete, and do not induce high commitment, theories in the pragmatic mode will always have a potential instability. When experiences are no longer rationally interpretable by a given theory, the pragmatist will look to a different theory; and it is this continual potential for change that makes such theorising of special political interest.

## 8.5 Everyday Organisational Theorising and Organisational Conflict

### 8.5.1 Oppositional Theorising

Remaining on the level where the understandings produced of organisational power and politics are relatively localised and restricted, I shall now consider the oppositional mode of theorising. Pragmatic and oppositional theorising have certain similarities which have persuaded some theorists (e.g. Parkin, 1972; Mann, 1970) to treat them as effectively the same. There is, indeed, some merit in doing so, for as I shall argue in section 8.6 they are so intertwined in practice as to require simultaneous examination in many cases. However they do have different theoretical implications, they can exist independently, and to see them as constituting a dynamic interrelationship rather than a unity has analytical advantages in the analysis of political instability and change.

As with pragmatic theorising, the structural framework is assessed in terms of its everyday facticity rather than its social legitimacy, but, unlike the former, oppositional theorising interprets organisational life in terms of conflict and resistance. The literature provides support for this cluster of characteristics, as well as its instability and potentiality.

The link between pragmatic and oppositional theorising is so strong that Parkin (1972, p.88ff.) subsumes both modes of interpretation under his "subordinate value-system". However, there is good reason to believe that he oversimplifies the sub-category of "fatalistic" responses and underplays the oppositional and conflict aspects of what he calls "instrumental collectivism". While the former implies an apathetic, pragmatic understanding of social life, the latter contains the seeds of oppositional theorising specifically associated with a "trade union consciousness".

Within the oppositional range of theories it is possible to distinguish two recurrent variants which combine opposition with a lack of ideology and commitment. These may range from a quasi-emotional feeling that "they" are against "us", with a similarly inspired "gut" strategy, to a more intellectualised but still localised analysis of the conflictful content of specific organisational issues. Regarding the former, in a non-industrial context, Goffman discusses

"... the 'intransigent line': the inmate intentionally challenges the institution by flagrantly refusing to co-operate with staff."  
(Goffman, 1961, p.62).

Within an industrial organisation, Nichols and Armstrong consider the "bloody-minded" to constitute a useful category of response to organisational control and authority. In this category,

"Some... are militantly non-political, but so bloody minded they are just the opposite of what you are - whatever you (including managers) happen to be. Others are men who simply will not put up with being 'messed about'... These men are responsible for a disproportionate share of those incidents that have to do with resentment about the way the workers are treated". (Nichols and Armstrong, 1976, p.61).

'Jacko' (see Nichols and Beynon, 1977, pp.136-137) typifies this view of organisational life in which conflict is a reasonable though localised and unsystematic response. This negative, personalised opposition was also noted by Beynon, who described it as the least developed form of "factory class consciousness" (Beynon, 1973, pp.98-99).

On a more intellectualised plane, some participants tend to interpret organisational life as a set of shifting, local, narrow issues which pitch 'us' against 'them' on a day-to-day basis. Such theorising involves less apparent arbitrariness, and may even dispute the priority of *their* rationality and perceptions over *ours* - at least on a localised, interpersonal level. Beynon (1973, e.g. p.149 and p.165), and the Chemco studies (Nichols and Beynon, 1977, e.g. pp.125-126 on grading) provide a number of examples in which workers and stewards are critically aware of conflict at the level of local rationality.<sup>7</sup>

Although Lockwood (1966) appears to conflate aspects of the two conflict modes in his discussion of "traditional proletarian" social images, the latter conception does offer the basic ingredients of oppositional theorising :

"Shaped by occupational solidarities and communal sociability the proletarian social consciousness is centred on an awareness of 'us' in contradistinction to 'them' who are not part of 'us'"  
(Lockwood, 1966, p.251).

Moore (1975, pp.53-54) unscrambles the intermingled aspects of the two implicit modes by distinguishing limited "market interests", which constitute the focus of his miners' oppositional theorising, from "class interests" which generalise conflict and opposition beyond local economic issues to the structural framework. Brannen et al. (1976, p.31) make a similar distinction in their discussion of "dichotomous frameworks" which divide industry into two opposing camps.

The limited conflict awareness, which centres on immediate organisational experiences and problems, has been explored in terms of various restricted versions of Marxian class consciousness, and, in the British context, has inevitably been linked with the traditions and ethos of the working class movement :

"Trade unionism and workshop organisation is, and always has been, a direct response to economic forces ... A factory class consciousness grew out of this; it understands class relationships in terms of their direct manifestations in conflict between the bosses and workers within the factory. It is rooted in the workplace... Implicitly tied up with the day-to-day battle with the boss." (Beynon, 1973, p.98; also p.197; see also Batstone et al., 1977, p.125):

Trade union consciousness, stressing narrow 'economistic' issues, also relates to the workers' current and historical, factual and ideological experiences, and is necessarily sharply distinguished from political class consciousness (cf. Lenin, 1977, p.66ff.; Wolpe, 1970, p.267ff.; Clements, 1977, p.316ff.; Anderson, 1977, pp.336-337; Parkin, 1972, pp.91-92; Nichols, 1974). Studies of worker and shop steward orientations provide evidence identifying the sectionalism and economism implicit in theorising which ties opposition and conflict to issues arising *within* the organisation. For example, with the trade union connection, it is not surprising to find significant elements of oppositional theorising amongst shop stewards. Poole (1974) speaks of "active militants" who

"... expected to be active and aggressive, challenging existing managerial prerogatives, the distribution of rewards and the conditions under which work was performed" (Poole, 1974, p.63; see also Batstone et al., 1977, p.268).<sup>8</sup>

However, in general, this localised conflict awareness

"... did not extend... to a wider critique of the socio-economic system in society at large."

(Poole, 1974, p.63; see also Lane, 1974, p.213).

Or else, broader alternative views, although held, may be seen as "impossible dreams" with little relevance to dealing with daily problems (cf. Brannen et al., 1976, p.32).

Much documentary evidence supports the argument that oppositional theorising may be analysed as separate from the pragmatic mode, although their concrete interrelationship, and its roots in the everyday experiences of power and politics, must remain a significant theoretical issue. The existence of critical and oppositional attitudes, however mixed with forms of acceptance, may have important consequences for future empirical possibilities.

#### 8.5.2 Alternative Theorising

It has been possible to introduce evidence which provide suggestive corroboration of the usefulness of the above three modes of theorising which participants, at various organisational levels, employ to make sense of their work experience. Simultaneously, I have discussed in passing some of the likely sources of these theories. Two related problems arise with alternative theorising that make it difficult to examine in any detail here. First, there is very little evidence concerning its existence on any scale; second, and one reason for the paucity of empirical data, there are fundamental experiential dilemmas which the alternative theorist must face - notably the need to survive in the short run in a structural framework which he is committed to destroy.<sup>9</sup>

As one might expect, the examination of revolutionary class consciousness has been largely the domain of Marxists, and their treatment has been generally either highly abstract and/or founded upon unsatisfactory objectivist-structuralist premises (cf. Wolpe, 1970; Maravell, 1976). In spite of its empirical rarity and

theoretical mishandling, alternative theorising is an empirical possibility which must not be ruled out by fiat.

"To my mind... the fundamental weakness of ... Lockwood's 1966 typology was that allowed no room, no box, for 'universalistic class consciousness'... or for the elements of such a consciousness... But one cannot simply ignore their past and present reality, even though they have been mixed with contradictory features".  
(Westergaard, 1975, p.251).

Parkin's "radical value-system" (1972, p.97ff.) provides a parallel conception to alternative theorising. In the context of organisational power and politics, the former promotes a *class* consciousness of organisational order and conflict, and suggests a clear perception of an alternative structural framework (cf. Goldthorpe, cited in Bulmer, 1975, p.5; see also Mann, 1973, p.13). Alternative theorising thus permits a clearly articulated analysis of the existing system in terms of its broad institutional topic and the latter's relationship to organisational life. It is the lack of just such a broad critical base that characterises the oppositional mode.

Like normative theorising, the alternative mode reflects and generates a broad theoretical understanding of the organisational facts at both the local and the societal level, so that issues which arise in the restricted organisational arena are interpreted in terms of (and as symptomatic of) the way the system *in toto* operates. However, while the former mode rationalises the given facts with respect to the social legitimacy of the status quo, alternative theorising comprehends them in terms of another rationality, another structural framework. Organisational relations are thus localised reflections of, and reinforcements to *class* relations as economic-political categories (cf. Nichols and Beynon, 1977); economic organisational issues are inherently

control and political issues; organisational control and political issues are really questions about societal politics and their relations to the prevailing institutional logic (cf. Nichols and Armstrong, 1976, p.28ff.). In general, then, the shift from oppositional to alternative theorising involves a process of political generalisation reasoned with respect to an alternative way of organising social and work relations.

Unlike the piecemeal, restricted scope nature of the oppositional mode, alternative theorising provides a general, coherent and relatively complete system of ideas for interpreting organisational reality, and can thus perform a social function :

"Members of the subordinate class who endorse radical values are thus provided not merely with a certain explanatory framework for the interpretation of social facts, but also a more favourable social identity". (Parkin, 1972, p.97).

For reasons of completeness and commitment, an alternative theory forms an ideological framework from which a consistent political/Political strategy of conflict can emerge. Such a mode - and Westergaard(1975, pp.251-252) distinguishes between degrees of awareness *within* this category - enables the committed adherent to evaluate critically (and formulate viable courses of political action - see 9.4) the rationality of the capitalist structural framework which permeates the 'obvious' and 'inevitable' structure of organisational power and politics.

As with the other modes of theorising, the researcher should not expect to find an alternative theory being used in any pure form. The truly politically conscious worker is a rare character, as Lane (1974, pp.213-215) and Poole (1974, pp.63-64) indicate in the context of shop stewards, but alternative theorising - its concepts and propositions - exist in varying degrees amongst the working class. It has been Westergaard's continuing contention

(e.g. Westergaard, 1970) that empirical research reveals the existence of elements of a radical class consciousness (cf. Moorhouse and Chamberlain, 1974), albethey incoherently organised, inarticulately expressed and intermingled with contradictory elements of other modes (see also Blackburn and Mann, 1975, p.155), and that this very fact requires the researcher to have such an 'alternative' category in his framework.

However, any examination of alternative theorising must return in the end to the paradoxical - even contradictory - position of its user. Unlike any of the other modes, alternative theorists interpret in terms of, and act for, another rationality - i.e. their interpretation demands, for consistency, withdrawal from and aggressive acts *against* the system - and yet their concrete survival demands participation *in* it, and conducting relationships with participants who interpret organisational life in terms of acceptance. The alternative theorist may face, in the short run anyway, a dilemma which is ideologically insoluble; but all organisational participants face smaller scale problems of interpretation which call for theoretical inconsistency.

## 8.6. Inconsistency in Everyday Organisational Theorising

### 8.6.1 The Problem of Inconsistency

I have argued the case for seeing the interpretive activity of theorising organisational power and politics as being analysable within four general modes of theorising which form a continuum according to type and degree of awareness implied. The discussion in sections 8.4 and 8.5 was concentrated upon the need to illustrate these separate modes, although it was inevitably impossible (indeed, undesirable) to treat them as if they existed in real independence of each other. In section 8.3, I referred to the theoretical issue of "inconsistency" in everyday organisational theorising, which points directly to the problem of interrelationships between these modes; it is to this issue that I now return.

It is possible, and observable, that organisational participants possess and use a number of theories according to their experience of organisational life. Where a theory is only partial or restricted in scope, it is probable that new or different experiences may induce the seeking of other theories in order to make sense of those experiences (cf. Brown and Brannen, 1970, p.207). Multiple theories may, and often will, fall within the *same* mode, but without more empirical knowledge about "variability" (see 8.3) the theoretical implications of such shiftings within a mode cannot be traced.<sup>10</sup> However, where simultaneous possession and use of theories - their concepts and/or propositions - covers two or more modes some general points of theoretical substance may be discussed. In this latter case I shall speak of inconsistency in theorising, although actors themselves may not (and often will not) perceive their interpretive activities as inconsistent in any way.

We have already seen how the idea of inconsistency or confusion or ambiguity or ambivalence (etc.) in everyday theorising has emerged from empirical work, but in terms of sociological theory it remains largely unexplored, even if it has been recognised. Schutz (1970) speaks of the actor's stock of knowledge which

"... embraces the most heterogeneous kinds of knowledge in a very incoherent and confused state. Clear and distinct experiences are intermingled with vague conjectures etc.... There are everywhere gaps, intermissions, discontinuities."  
(Schutz, 1970, pp.97-98).

In spite of the generality and implied universality of such a statement, and of Schutz's neglect of how and why such inconsistency exists, the problem is clearly recognised - it is still in need of prolonged theoretical examination.

In examining the problem of inconsistency I shall continue the policy of indicating probable sources of (multiple) theorising

i.e. perceiving the latter as the subjectively rational response of organisational participants to the structural framework of organisational power. I shall in general be arguing that inconsistency in attitudes, concepts and theories tends to reflect the subjectively-experienced world of fact and ideology, and that it is a normal and common feature of the participants' interpretive (and strategic) activities (cf. Nichols and Armstrong, 1976, p.152); further it should be sociologically explored rather than neutralised by constructing static typologies with assumptions of 'primacy' (e.g. Etzioni - see Chapter Two), or by reducing inconsistencies to statistical "central tendencies". This is also Nichols and Armstrong's strategy :

"Theoretically, we will not be concerned to round-out seemingly sensible typifications of social perspectives - an enterprise which is likely to lead to a representation of people's thought which is more logical, more functional and apparently stable than the thought of the individual represented, or of whole classes of individuals may be. We want to concentrate precisely on this inchoateness" (Nichols and Armstrong, 1976, p.150).

In short, inconsistency, inchoateness, incoherence (or whatever) may themselves be theoretically significant in understanding the dynamics and potentialities of organisational politics (see 8.6.3).

In discussing the question of consistency or inconsistency in everyday theorising it is necessary to consider two related factors concerning "internal" consistency and "external" consistency. Internal consistency involves the completeness of the "imagery" of the theory in question - the more complete and coherent a theory, the more stable it is likely to be. External consistency is related to the nature of social commitment, so that, to be consistent externally, a theory must provide imagery which is compatible with organisational experiences. Obviously, to an

extent, an internally-consistent, complete theory, will be able to make sense of any and all experience; but few theories can aspire to this theoretical ideal. In the ensuing pages I shall suggest that normative and alternative theories are most likely to approach this ideal of consistency, whilst pragmatic and oppositional theories are most likely to encourage inconsistency. The implications of theoretical inconsistency for understanding organisational power and politics will be traced and followed into Chapter Nine.

#### 8.6.2 'Consistency' in Theorising

Although inconsistency is likely to characterise most participants' interpretive efforts, it is possible for actors to become committed to one theory, or mode of theorising, to such an extent as to render unnecessary or irrelevant the employment of other theories or modes. Where consistency does arise, however, it is most likely to concern the use of normative and alternative theories - particularly the former. Both of these modes offer a closed system of ideas in the context of which societal *and* organisational issues derive a coherence and rationality. To the extent that they are complete, they make it possible to rationalise and justify all experiences either with respect to the social legitimacy of the status quo, or with respect to an alternative structural framework. In short, they are most likely to be "internally consistent".

The stability of these modes derives not only from the complete, overarching nature of the theory, but also from the level of commitment they tend to invoke. The greater the commitment - the more total the dedication (cf. Burns, 1977, p.110) - to the ideological order or conflict viewpoint, the more incontrovertible becomes the theory.<sup>11</sup> High social commitment and 'completeness' of social imagery are obviously compatible with a stable consistent mode of theorising; but on the other hand, such consistency is only likely to endure where the concrete experiences of everyday

theorists are entirely in tune with the imagery and expectations of the theory in question, i.e. where there is external consistency.

Internal consistency can coexist with external inconsistency when the latter is not subjectively perceived, or not understood as significant. Such coexistence may on the one hand demonstrate the degree of success of an ideology in rationalising even apparently contradictory experiences - the hallmark of hegemonic order or a developed counter-hegemony; or on the other hand emphasise the human characteristic of being able to live through contradictions perhaps by compartmentalising experiences. In spite of the possibility of such coexistence giving rise to stability and consistency in the use of theories, incompatibility between theorising and experience always makes that stability and consistency precarious. Aspirational theories may be rejected when ambition meets recurrent failure; deferential theories may falter when organisational rationality creates insecurity and unemployment; furthermore, as mentioned above (8.5.2), alternative theories will always be subject to compromise because of the theorists need to subsist within the structural framework he opposes.

### 8.6.3 "Inconsistency" in Theorising

Although inconsistency can and does exist in theorising centred around the normative and alternative modes - as just proposed - I shall be specifically concerned with restricted, localised theories. The reasons for this are fairly straightforward: first, research indicates that most participants perceive their organisational lives from either a pragmatic or an oppositional base - in many cases the relationship between these two modes is so close as to make it empirically impossible to locate such a base (see section 8.5.1); second, the incompleteness and restricted scope of such theories, and the relative lack of commitment to them, implies internal inconsistency and a tendency to shift from one theory (its conceptions and propositions) to another in order to account sensibly for organisational experiences.

I shall, moreover, only be paying attention to instabilities and shiftings which result from the use of multiple theories spanning two or more modes (see 8.3).

It is possible to distinguish between two types of inconsistent theorising in the context of the arguments presented above. First, there is the simultaneous possession and use of conceptions and propositions at different levels of awareness within the same type of theorising i.e. shiftings between normative and pragmatic (i.e. order) theories or between alternative and oppositional (i.e. conflict) theories. The coexistence of active and passive consent at different levels of social action has been explored empirically and theoretically (cf. Mann, 1970; Parkin, 1972, p.91ff.; Femia, 1975, pp.45-46), while studies of shop stewards in particular (cf. Lane, 1974; Poole, 1974) illustrate the dialectic between localised opposition and generalised social criticism. The second type of inconsistent theorising is perhaps more important because it implies not simply inconsistency between levels of awareness, but apparent contradiction between *types* of awareness.

In regard of this latter point, the notion of 'contradictory consciousness' seems to be of special significance :

"... in Gramsci's view, the ordinary man possesses a 'contradictory consciousness'; his perceptions and evaluations of social life exhibit inconsistency and superficiality, which express the gap between the dominant interpretation of reality and his objective situation. Lurking beneath the usually conforming surface are subversive beliefs and values, latent instincts of rebellion, which are sometimes translated into actual behaviour". (Femia, 1975, pp.42-43).

In contradictory consciousness there exist side-by-side, consensus and deviance, order theorising and conflict theorising. In the

context of *organisational* power and politics, the available evidence, and theoretical argument, would point to the localised modes of theorising - viz. pragmatic and oppositional - as constituting the focus of this inconsistency. The relationship of these two modes is important in understanding *both* the nature of organisational politics at any given time *and* the potentialities implicit in organisational theorising and strategies by virtue of the (tenuous) balance between these 'opposing' views being united in the everyday activity of living one's organisational life (cf. Corrigan, 1975, p.222). If experiences arise which are no longer tenable within this interpretive coalition of modes, the seeds for change may germinate.

Recurrent discussions of various restricted variants of class consciousness amongst organisational participants would seem to support this proposition concerning the dialectical relationship between pragmatic and oppositional theorising e.g. Beynon's discussion of "factory class consciousness" of shop-floor workers and stewards (cf. Clements, 1977; Mann, 1973). That these forms of localised class consciousness consist of both consent and conflict aspects is now well demonstrated both in general theoretical terms (e.g. Parkin, 1972; Femia, 1975) and in specific cases (e.g. Nichols, 1974; Beynon, 1973; Nichols and Armstrong, 1976, p.153ff.).

The problems remain as to why and how a large number of organisational participants can maintain an interpretive position of dual or multiple inconsistent theorising. As implied above, the most tenable argument about the source of inconsistent interpretations of social and organisational reality is that the latter itself provides factual and ideological inconsistencies which are experienced and made sense of on a day-to-day basis, rather than seeking, on an intellectual level, some overarching framework that explains contradictory experiences. Illustrative of this suggestive proposition are Beynon's arguments about the personal *and* impersonal aspects of managerial behaviour as experienced by stewards (1973, p.105) and the cooperative *and* the conflict

aspects of shop-floor experience (1973, p.102); Nichols (1974) traces such inconsistencies further at the institutional, ideological level, by suggesting that "labourist" ideas which inform shop-floor theorising are themselves inconsistent. At an equally general level, Moorhouse (1973) examines how working class political consciousness has been historically influenced by the inconsistent development of the structure of the British political system. Such contradictory elements of social and organisational life are normal, sociologically expected features of the capitalist structural framework (see 7.4), and they enter into the everyday experiences of participants, theorised and made rational "despite their conceptual contradictoriness" (Corrigan, 1975, p.223).

It is probable that organisational participants are able to theorise such contradictions for a long period without becoming aware of their experiences *as* contradictions. Habitual, routinised use of theorising and compartmentalisation of experiences are features of normal interpretive activities which serve to inhibit awareness of contradictions at a structural level. However, the very coexistence of consent and conflict, co-operation and opposition etc. creates a latent or potential instability which, under certain circumstances may be realised, with subsequent repercussions for political interpretation, political strategy and political action. In order to clarify these continually-present empirical possibilities, I shall briefly (and tentatively) consider the interrelationships between modes of theorising.

Figure 8.2

Interrelationships between Modes of  
Everyday Organisational Theorising.

		Type of Awareness	
		'Order Awareness	'Conflict' Awareness
Degree of Awareness (completeness and commitment)	High (ideology)	Normative Theorising	Alternative Theorising
	Low (non-ideology)	Pragmatic Theorising	Oppositional Theorising

Figure 8.2 suggests some simple lines of argument concerning potential shifts between modes of theorising centred upon the pragmatic-oppositional relationship. In examining a participant with a basically pragmatic base to his theorising, for example, one would also be likely to find elements of the normative and oppositional modes intermingled in an apparently inchoate or inconsistent interpretive scheme. Westergaard, for example, suggests that

"... There is a fair amount of evidence - from the Luton survey, the other studies under discussion and further recent work - to show that 'social criticism' co-exists with 'social apathy' in contemporary British working-class consciousness" (Westergaard, 1970, p.121).

This *implies* a combination of pragmatic and oppositional (or rather "part-alternative, part-oppositional") theories; on the other hand, I have already detailed the debate over the coexistence of active and passive consent. As mentioned above, Beynon (1973) and the Chemco studies provide ample documentary support for the idea of a "pragmatic cluster" of theories at the organisational level.

The empirical potentialities of the pragmatic cluster are obviously complex in their detail, but one may sketch a general, tentative picture. Under certain circumstances, one might expect the focus of such everyday organisational theorising to shift to the broadly normative mode - specifically where participants perceive the structural framework (or its representatives) as being benevolent, and permitting them to realise an enlarged range of social possibilities without direct hindrance or constraint. Such a shift both reflects, and is descriptive of the social accomplishment of hegemonic order. On the other hand, where the structural framework (or its representatives) is experienced as coercive and restrictive of participants' social possibilities, where struggle and resistance become the sole means of maintaining economic or social welfare, the shift in the focus of theorising is likely to be towards the oppositional mode. *In general*<sup>12</sup> the move to an oppositional base, and its limited recognition of structural contradictions, will be associated with the social accomplishment of structural order in its 'domination' mode. Westergaard's analysis (1970) of the potentialities of a "brittle cash nexus" is based upon just such ambivalent theorising when the economy no longer produces the necessary cash to satisfy pragmatic, instrumentally-oriented workers. His proposition goes one step further, in suggesting that opposition and discontent may become generalised as a result of the failure of the cash nexus, thus potentially creating a radical class consciousness - a "counter-ideology" - based upon alternative theorising.<sup>13</sup>

The effects that experiences (contradictory or otherwise) have on the open theorising implicit in the pragmatic cluster, will in turn operate upon the formulation of the political strategies of organisational participants, and such strategies will have some influence (intended and/or unintended) on the shape of the political process.

Parallel to the pragmatic cluster is another cluster of theories which has a base in the oppositional mode. The same arguments, founded upon the precariousness of the pragmatic-oppositional interrelationship under conditions which encourage

the transparency of its inconsistencies, apply to the oppositional cluster. Under structural conditions of domination, workers or shop stewards who theorise in oppositional terms, may generalise an organisational issue (e.g. static wages; unemployment) to its source in the institutional logic and hence ground their political challenge to the organisation in an alternative rationality. On the other hand, a degree of market and organisational slack which enables workers to benefit directly from the system is more likely to lead to a pragmatic, practical acceptance of the status quo - for the time being anyway. Once in the position of passive consent, the possibility always exists for a complete conversion to order theorising (e.g. by promotion).

By investigating the concept of inconsistent theorising as a focus of sociological interest rather than of neglect, I have tried to portray it as both a static and potentially dynamic factor in understanding the relationship between the structural framework and the participants' interpretation of the organisation as a political phenomenon.

#### Summary

By treating the participants' acts of theorising as the important variable factor mediating the structural framework and political action, while at the same time being interrelated with the former, I hope to have established an interpretive sociological foundation for the analysis of organisational power and politics. All participants, whether consciously or habitually, employ theories which attempt to make sense of the organisation in its orderly or conflictful facets. Because of empirical ignorance about the variability of everyday organisational theories, my arguments were built upon a classification of theories according to their sensitivity to political order and political conflict, and each mode of theorising was discussed, with illustrative empirical support, with respect to its internal characteristics,

its possible variants, and its relationship to different participants' positions vis-a-vis the structural framework. In order to maintain a meaningful degree of complexity to the analysis, each mode was discussed in relation to the other, and propositions about inconsistent theorising and its importance for both current political action and future possible actions were discussed.

In the final substantive chapter of this thesis, I shall bring these interpretive arguments closer to concrete political actions in organisations, by examining the strategic aspects of participants' theorising activities. As I shall show, political strategies embody the interpretive images that have been discussed in projected courses of action to influence the structural framework which underlies participants' organisational lives.

NOTES

1. This distinction between interpretive and strategic work is very important if the interpretive sociological tradition is to avoid the limitations of ethnomethodology, which stresses the constitution of social reality as the interpretive, reflexive accomplishment of making experiences rational and accountable. Analysis of strategic work adds the social dimension of active striving to accomplish some *future* state of the world (cf. Giddens, 1976, p.40).
2. I am here divorcing the question of 'completeness' of image from that of its *accuracy*. The latter problem leads to a discussion of 'true' or 'false' consciousness which does not help in this context. The 'success' of a theory in making experiences rational and accountable does not depend upon its truth-value, but upon its capacity to interpret all or most things at any given time.
3. There are, of course, weaknesses in the labels I have chosen in this context. Some theorists and philosophers have treated 'pragmatism' as a total way of understanding and responding to social life, which induces a high degree of commitment. My use of the term neither competes with nor reflects such an argument; nor should my use of the term here and later be confused with its deployment in Chapter Five. Further, 'alternative' may better be rendered by 'alternative-normative', since this mode is just as 'normative' as that which bears the latter label. Finally, my analysis of their modes does not involve judgments concerning the rationality of different modes for their adherents.
4. Goffman's discussion of secondary adjustments to total institutional life is interesting in this respect. He speaks of "conversion" (Goffman, 1961, p.63) as a mode of adapting to the special circumstances of the total institution, whereby inmates accept fully the institutional self propounded by the staff.
5. It is interesting to note that Brannen et al. attach the label "pragmatic" to a "pluralist framework" of everyday theorising. This linking of academic and everyday theories, as I have argued, is obviously not incidental. (See 10.2.1.)
6. Again, Goffman (1961, pp.61-62) speaks of "situational withdrawal" as one "line of adaptation" to the pressures of (total) organisational life.
7. The Hawthorne Studies researchers were probably the first significant social scientists to formulate organisational conflict in terms of opposing logics, although their contribution failed to ground such a view in a political perspective.

8. Batstone et al. (1977) identify a strong localised conflict awareness among shop-floor stewards - grounded perhaps in an equally strong sense of working-class history - but staff stewards have ambivalence between the normative/aspirational views associated with staff status, and the oppositional experiences of being a steward. In general the conflict aspects of their theorising appear to become secondary (Batstone et al., 1977, pp.26-29).
9. A second reason for the lack of evidence arises from the social scientist's tendency to neglect the revolutionary as a significant actor. This neglect often happens at the level of theoretical assumption rather than as a result of empirical study - another example of theoretical circularity. For example, Goffman (1961) in his study of mental hospitals distinguished between 'disruptive' secondary adjustments ...  

"... where the realistic intentions of the participants are to abandon the organisation or radically alter its structure..." (Goffman, 1961, p.180)

and 'contained' ones (i.e. adapting *to* the system), but concentrates only on the latter.
10. Since it is difficult therefore to judge whether shifting within a mode is consistent or inconsistent, I shall make no reference to this phenomenon in the following discussion.
11. This 'human commitment' factor is particularly important in distinguishing 'genuine' alternative or normative theorists from those who have strategically adopted this apparent stance in order to achieve more limited goals. In section 8.4.1, for example, deferential theorising was taken as illustrative of the normative mode, but it has been suggested (e.g. Bell and Newby, 1975, p.87) that deferential attitudes and actions, giving the *impression* of normative acceptance of their role, may be adopted by house servants, slaves etc. for pragmatic and strategic reasons (e.g. maintenance of income, status, even life itself). Indeed 'on-stage' deference may well be compatible with 'off-stage' rebellion.
12. I stress "*in general*", because there will always be pockets of conflict on specific issues even within a broad state of hegemony. The latter, as in the pluralist image of power, may refer to a broad acceptance of the rules and procedures for dealing with and limiting organisational conflicts.
13. Moorhouse and Chamberlain (1974) and Moorhouse (1976) argue empirically for the real possibility of such a shift in awareness :

"In certain circumstances, a conflict consciousness [i.e. oppositional theorising E.D.C.] can develop into a radical or even revolutionary consciousness because underlying class conflict is the belief that things could and should be better than they are, however weakly this may be verbalised". (Moorhouse, 1976, p.471).

The underlying theme of Moorhouse's published work is the spontaneity of working class political action, and the irrelevance of clear, "unconfused", consistent alternative theorising to revolutionary action.

EVERYDAY ORGANISATIONAL THEORISING : STRATEGIC ASPECTS

In Chapter Eight, I examined the nature of everyday organisational theorising with special reference to the interpretive process of perceiving, constructing images of and evaluating the organisation as a political arena. The central theme of that chapter was to demonstrate the mediating role played by participants' theorising activities in the relationship between the structural framework of organisational power and organisational politics - the latter being that process of social interactions created by actors whose subjectively-meaningful behaviour is oriented towards the problems of control in organisations. By concentrating on the interpretive aspects of theorising, attention was drawn particularly to the contingent and dialectical relationship between everyday theories and the structural framework which they both comprehend and reflect in varying degrees. In this last chapter, with its focus on the strategic aspects of everyday theorising, the direct (i.e. intended) and indirect (i.e. unintended) connection of theorising with political action and process will constitute the major theme.

The proposition to be examined in the light of previous discussion is that certain participants, acting upon the social and organisational imagery and awareness, and their ongoing experiences of work life, consciously choose to support, to manipulate or to challenge the structural framework which organises and rationalises their organisational existence. In examining this proposition, further points of substance arise. In pursuit of their planned courses of action, some actors will have greater initial possibilities of political success because of their relationship to the structural framework; further, the unintended consequences of pursuing political strategies - however well or badly conceived - or, more broadly, of the *social* intermingling of active support, resistance, opposition etc., will influence the final outcome of the political process. (see 9.5). Political strategies, then, will have both intended effects - these effects being reinforced

or restricted by structural predispositions towards order and conflict - and unintended effects on the process of organisational politics. These points need emphasis, because participants - even top participants - cannot construct their world to order. However well-theorised or planned, strategies are not self-fulfilling, since they confront both structural and social (i.e. they exist with other complementary, identical, opposing etc. strategies of action) limits to their successful realisation. These are the structural and social faces of power as constraint.

In this chapter I wish to bring my arguments to their conclusion by examining the relationship between the interpretive and strategic aspects of theorising, and to illustrate very broadly the three major categories of political strategy which emerge from the foregoing analysis. In outlining these strategies, I shall consider the structural and social contexts in which they occur, and how these contexts reinforce or limit (intentionally or unintentionally) their realisation.

#### 9.1 Political Strategy and Everyday Organisational Theorising

To speak of political action is to emphasise the conscious interest of participants in the problems of power and control in organisational arenas; in attempting to increase their (i.e. their group's or "the organisation's" or their own) control or to defend it, they intentionally or unintentionally affect other participants' range of possible actions and in doing so implicate others in the political process. To study organisational politics as a *social process* is thus to go beyond an investigation of actors' purposive strategies, to the analysis of how these strategies interrelate and influence each other within the structural framework which defines the limiting possibilities and impossibilities of all actors. My concern is only with establishing the sensitising building-blocks of such a study, and before looking at the intended and unintended consequences of political action, or examining the structural and social possibilities and impossibilities of political success, it

is necessary to place the notion of "strategy" within the established arguments.

All participants are theorists in that they all employ (consciously or habitually) concepts and propositions to account for their experiences of organisational life. Organisational participants are not necessarily politically active since some proportion of them will not consciously attempt to influence their control possibilities in the organisation. However, all participants, whether politically active or passively accepting, are implicated directly or indirectly in the political process. In order to understand the political actions of participants, it is imperative to analyse that aspect of the everyday theorising of organisational power and politics wherein courses of action are, with purpose, planned and projected. Such strategies may be aimed at supporting, challenging or otherwise affecting the distribution of power in organisations, consequently influencing the structural framework of power (cf. Duverger, 1966, p.141ff.). From the actor's viewpoint, political action may be seen as consciously formulated behaviour with the above ends. Strategies, therefore, have a direct link with political action, and, through the consequences of such action, both a direct and indirect link with the process of politics.

At the same time, strategies may be seen as projected courses of action based upon the imagery and knowledge created by the interpretive activities of organisational participants. In a political context, these strategic aspects of everyday organisational theorising complement the interpretive aspects described in Chapter Eight. Moreover, one might add, political strategies may be analysed with respect of the structural framework of organisational power in the ways indicated in Chapter Eight. Some of the complexities of these relationships between strategy, theorising, structural framework, political action and political process will be unravelled in the following sections.

Accepting, for the time being, the direct and indirect links of political strategy with political action and process, I want to suggest a set of sensitising categories which derives from the discussion in Chapter Eight and, at the same time, points to distinct forms of political action. Figure 9.1 represents the three general political strategies within the framework of the now familiar diagram.

Figure 9.1 Three General Political Strategies

		Types of Awareness	
		'order' awareness (acceptance)	'conflict' awareness (Rejection)
Degree of Awareness	High (Ideological)	Conservative strategy	Revolutionary strategy
(Commitment and Completeness)	Low (non- ideological)	reformist strategy	

Since the component ideas have already been fully discussed in 8.2 I shall only summarise the diagram and leave detailed examination of the strategies to the following sections.

Participants *qua* political actors who theorise their organisational experience mainly in normative terms are most likely to convert their understandings into projected courses of action aimed at conserving the structural framework, to the premises and logic of which they are committed. Those who directly benefit from the status quo or indirectly benefit from or identify with its continuity (see 8.4) may to varying degrees develop plans which explicitly and actively support the organisational order. "Conservative" strategies may thus be linked with the politics of order and consensus.

The practical difficulties of the alternative theorist have already been touched upon with respect to the dilemma of maintaining a strictly and entirely radical perspective. These difficulties become more practical when he tries to translate his alternative interpretation of social and organisational reality into political action. "Ideally", anyway - and I shall speak "realistically" in 9.4 - the alternative theorist may be expected to adopt strategies which are actively oriented towards changing the structural framework from the societal level downwards. "Revolutionary" strategies, grounded in an alternative rationality, are consequently associated with the politics of conflict and change.

In Chapter Eight, I placed great emphasis upon the theoretical interrelationship between pragmatic and oppositional modes of theorising. Both modes focus upon localised, restricted interpretations of the political dimension of organisations, and research suggests that elements of each tend to coexist in most organisational participants' interpretive schemes. Although it might be possible empirically to distinguish between "clusters" of theories according to their 'base' in either pragmatism or oppositionism, I have decided - for the purposes of generality and simplicity - to treat the strategic aspects of this large range of localised, inconsistent theorising as one general category. I shall suggest that pragmatic and oppositional theories, and particularly clusters which involve elements of both modes, tend to encourage in political actors the adoption of strategies aimed, consciously or by implication, at *adapting* those details of the structural framework which affect the strategist. By calling such strategies "reformist", I would tie these preconceived plans of action to the politics of adaptation.

Before looking at these strategies in depth, I wish to make four important theoretical points which are in danger of being lost in the details of discussion and illustration. The first three points are caveats to be taken up in the summary at the end of the chapter (9.5), the fourth concerns an analytical distinction between types of strategy within the three main categories.

In sections 9.2, 9.3 and 9.4 I shall be examining each general political strategy more-or-less separately, but it is imperative to warn the reader against assuming thereby that these strategies are either free-floating, or self-realising, or enacted in a 'pure' form. Only by understanding the complex inter-relationships between structural framework, everyday organisational theorising, political strategies, political action and political process, can the nature of organisational power and politics be comprehended. Consider the first of these caveats viz. that strategies are not free-floating.

Throughout Chapter Eight I reiterated the reciprocal connections between the structural framework of organisational power and participants' theorised interpretations and experience of it. Everyday organisational theories are historically and structurally grounded, in that they incorporate knowledge of the structural framework accumulated and distilled through previous and ongoing experience of organisational life and rationality. Strategies generated from and founded upon such knowledge will therefore also embody participants' prior experience of what was possible or impossible under certain circumstances. This is to say that, for the most part anyway, political strategies will be formulated *from the start* to reflect perceived possibilities and impossibilities<sup>1</sup>, rather than be "free-floating" or "unrealistic". Structural possibilities and impossibilities may of course be misperceived, so that strategies, however well planned and internally coherent, will not be realised in effective political action.<sup>2</sup> In this way, strategies and their enactment in political behaviour have theoretically mediated relationships with their structural and social contexts of use.

The question of realisation of strategies is at least partially related to the last point. Although discussion will mostly revolve around separate strategies, it is certainly not assumed that, once formulated, they will be effective in the ways intended by political actors. At one level, as suggested in the previous paragraph, political strategies may to a greater or lesser

extent incorporate misperceptions and misunderstandings of the structural possibilities of their success. For example, certain adventures of the Red Army Faction throughout Europe reflect the unrealistic premises of their strategies which have meant that failure in their political aims was predictable - their planned courses of action have met a completely resistant strategy from the social representatives of the system they were threatening, and these representatives could operate from a position of supremacy regarding both coercion and organisation. Strategies may fail, then, both because they are unrealistic in themselves, and relatedly because powerful counter-strategies may be enacted to resist or actively combat the former. In spite of their lack of success, such strategies and their attempted enactments are still important politically, because they may have consequences which were not foreseen by their proponents. For example, the 'violent' revolutionary attempts of groups such as those mentioned might act as a warning of later ones with consequent more effective or stringent counter-strategies being developed in secret; they might influence 'political opinion' making it more difficult for 'peaceful' revolutionary groups to gain credibility and extend organisation; 'violent' reactionary groups might multiply, etc. In short, attempts to enact political strategies may have both intended and/or unintended effects, and the latter will often be of greater social import. Relative success will thus depend upon the extent of counter or supportive actions, themselves structurally "helped" or "hindered", and upon the unintended repercussions of the complex nature of purposive activity. The intended and unintended consequences of the strategies of the various political actors may be understood as constituting the social (i.e. concrete) context of any particular political strategy or action. As such the social context may be analytically differentiated from the structural framework of organisational power and politics, but both "contexts" are indispensable to the analysis of the topic.

Just as everyday theorising will in general be hybrid, comprising elements from diverse theories often in different modes, so too might one expect political strategy rarely to take any pure

form. The empirical problems of "variability", and of possible combinations of particular strategies falling within one category or between many categories, are matters for research rather than uninformed guesswork, but in writing of separate categories of political strategy I am not limiting to only pure forms the scope of this, after all, sensitising framework.

Political strategies are neither 'pure' nor 'free-floating', nor inevitably realised, but they do constitute the second link in the chain of everyday organisational theorising as it mediates the structural framework of organisational power, and political action/process. In order to further the analysis of political strategy, I shall distinguish between two types of strategy, viz. control and consensus. *Control strategies* may be defined as plans of action aimed at influencing the 'factual' aspects of organisational life (e.g. procedures, work process, information etc.) which concretely restrain or facilitate social actions. Such strategies may be either defensive - if one's (i.e. individual or group) position is perceived as being actively challenged - or positive, in the sense of deliberately attempting to expand influence, increase social possibilities or decrease social impossibilities. All political strategies, by definition, will involve control aspects. *Consensus strategies* will usually be associated with those theories of an ideological kind i.e. to which there is a degree of moral commitment. Such strategies are planned attempts to control the ideological context of work; to achieve one's political ends by trying to influence "... the minds and wills of the men" (Nichols and Beynon, 1977, p.113). Consensus strategies are designed to legitimise one's position by affecting the way participants theorise and perceive the organisation.

As with the distinction between the 'factual' and 'ideological' aspects of the structural framework (see Chapter 7.2) that between 'control' and 'consensus' strategies is largely of analytical interest. As argued in Chapter Seven, the facts are always laden with values, although few participants may directly

see them in this way. Similarly, control tactics within an overall conservative or revolutionary strategy themselves carry connotations of the ideas and values which give them purpose. However, the distinction does allow us first to distinguish strategies which primarily or intentionally aim at control of the work situation from those which seek to establish the legitimacy of the group's position or aims by "indoctrination"; it also allows us to distinguish between 'control' and 'consensus' aspects (whether intended or unintended) of any particular strategy.

The remainder of this chapter is devoted to investigating the general political strategies within these guidelines, and subject to the caveats, expressed above.

## 9.2 Conservative Strategy and the Politics of Organisational Order

### 9.2.1 Conservative Strategy and Conservative Strategists

Based as it is upon the legitimacy of the organisation and its structural framework as a social, political and moral order, normative theorising finds its strategic extension in the active support of the status quo. Within an organisational context, conservative strategies may be seen as relatively coherent plans to maintain or increase the rationality of the organisation. In general this would imply the employment of tactics which aim to sustain the amount of control which the organisation (i.e. executives, managers and other 'controllers') asserts over the work process. Where conservative strategies are enacted and pursued, I shall refer to the politics of order. The core processes of the politics of order include the reinforcement and extension of organisational rationality by the 'authoritative' application of the control system and the design of improved techniques, practices etc. They involve both the *social* enactment of *structural* predispositions, and the social creation of more rational techniques that accord with the dominant ideology and the dominant way of doing things and

thereby reaffirm the structural framework.

One of the advantages of these conceptions of the politics of order and of conservative strategy is that they provide an important way of avoiding the structural determinism referred to in earlier chapters. In order to explain organisational behaviour, reference to 'rationality', 'techniques' or 'structure' is not sufficient, because the latter only sets up predispositions which must be socially mediated and enacted, however routinely. These enactments - what I am calling the politics of order - do not occur inevitably or automatically<sup>3</sup>, however 'obvious' or 'inevitable' what is enacted may appear to participants or observers. It is, of course, this 'obviousness' and 'routineness' of conservative strategies which gives them a special 'power' by virtue of being directly tied to the dominant ideology - the power of apparent neutrality, impartiality and "unideology". It is the *same* 'obviousness' and 'routineness' which leads uncritical sociologists to accept and analyse the politics of order as "apolitical" and "objective", so reinforcing a structural image of the way organisations work, i.e. without social mediation.

As all managers of men are only too aware, organisational order does not occur automatically through the impartial operation of structural or technical factors which determine compliance objectively. In spite of the obviousness and routineness of the organisational facts of life, order has to be socially and politically accomplished :

"... 'integration' is no neutral - or 'natural' - social process. It is a definite managerial strategy..." (Nichols and Beynon, 1977, p.107).

Conservative strategies, devoted to the realisation of structural predispositions towards order, reflect and reinforce the factual and ideological basis of organisational rationality, and derive their great potential for success in their social grounding in the structural framework of organisational power.

In 8.4 I distinguished between types of normative theorising and the organisational participants likely to indulge in them. In particular I distinguished between those higher participants - capital owners, executives, top management etc. - who will tend to have a direct identification with the structural framework; and those normative theorists - aspirational and deferential - who are committed through a rather more tenuous set of subjective images. Conservative strategy and the politics of order would seem to be especially prevalent amongst the former set of participants, although there is evidence to underscore its existence in the lower echelons of middle management, clerical staff, supervisory and shop floor workers. The Chemco studies provide illustrations of conservative strategy in the latter two categories :

"... some of the politically minded - though very few - are ideologically committed to free enterprise. One for example attempts to 'control' his fellow workers. He keeps a book on their absences, checks their log keeping, and in other ways carries out management's policy even more committedly than management dares". (Nichols and Armstrong, 1976, p.70).

On the shop floor such active commitments are rare, but in slightly higher groups they may occur through aspirational identification, e.g. foremen :

"What makes management men exceptional is that they actively *search* for more profits... Highly cost conscious individuals, they watch their production figures, check waste, 'get on top of the men', 'get on top of the plant', act not just *for* management but *like* management". (Nichols and Beynon, 1977, p.49).

That such avid commitment and active striving to increase 'rationality' and control can exist in the lower ranks, simply

serves to emphasise the likelihood of more widespread use of conservative strategy amongst top participants who benefit most directly and fully from the status quo.

Being related to a mode of theorising of an ideological kind, conservative strategy induces in its repertoire both control and consensus types. Conservative control strategies involve planned attempts to influence the factual context of work by socially implementing the procedures, practices, techniques, rules etc. which prescribe subordinate behaviour, and organise it 'rationally' in accordance with the organisation's structural framework. Conservative consensus strategies concern the engineering of active consent for the way the system works by trying to legitimise the latter. The premise underlying expending effort on policies of legitimation is the sound social scientific principle - popularised for management by various human relations schools<sup>4</sup> - that the moral acceptance of the structural possibilities and impossibilities increases the probability of efficient managerial control of the work process *on a continuous basis*. Remembering that strategies of control always have implicit ideological grounding in organisational rationality and institutional logic, I shall now consider them, and follow this with a discussion of consensus strategies.

#### 9.2.2 Conservative Control Strategy

As suggested earlier, control strategies may be analysed as having two forms viz. taking positive steps or making defensive manoeuvres. Within the context of normative theorising, positive control strategies involve following a course of action which intends to maintain or improve the amount of control exercised over organisational participants and their work. By enacting and enforcing structural possibilities and impossibilities - i.e. operating the control system and its component parts - those who employ conservative strategies attempt to make organisational behaviour rational, in accordance with localised and institutional premises. As argued earlier, the fact that such strategies invoke routines and

apparently neutral techniques should not mislead the observer into believing that they are thereby apolitical or impartial.<sup>5</sup> Defensive control strategies on the other hand are employed in order to prevent resistance or opposition from reaching dimensions that challenge or reduce the rationality of the organisation.

While control strategies may be either positive or defensive in intent, it is more sensible, on *a priori* grounds, to consider most strategies as being mixed i.e. as having both positive and defensive aspects. It is further necessary to reiterate that the enactment of purposive control strategies may have unforeseen consequences which serve either to increase positive control, to establish defensive control, to reduce such control, or to influence the course of political actions more generally (e.g. by creating political squabbles between subordinate groups). The positive or defensive pursuit of organisational order may therefore, unintentionally, add fuel to the politics of adaptation and of change. In order to illustrate these points about positive and defensive aspects of conservative control strategy, and to demonstrate the importance of distinguishing political intentions from political 'unintentions', I shall discuss four well-documented examples of such strategy - coercion, fragmentation, incorporation and restrictionism.

Strategies of coercion are probably the most obvious means of politically enforcing structural possibilities and impossibilities. Coercion may involve the explicit use (or threat) of physical force, but it should by no means be identified with this extreme. More broadly, coercion refers to the subjection of actors to unavoidable constraint, and thereby cutting off certain courses of action by rendering them socially impossible. Any organisational participant who is dependent upon the resources or support provided by his employment for the maintenance of 'essential' aspects of his social life, is subject to coercion when such resources or support may be withdrawn (or this is threatened) - cf. Fox, 1974b, p.37ff. At last resort and subject to certain legal restraints, employers or

management can terminate employment with various implications for economic and social hardship. In industrial organisations, coercive strategies are most likely to be adopted by highly competitive, "cost-conscious" managements (Lane, 1974, p.193; see also Nichols and Beynon's discussion of "management men" 1977, p.48ff. - and of the division of managers into "bastards" and "bad bastards" - 1977, p.34ff.); and managers are most likely to become strategically cost-conscious when the market becomes 'tight'. Where a tight market develops, it is organisationally rational and politically strategic for managers to crack down on control possibilities which have been extended beyond structural necessity in slack times (cf. Beynon, 1973, p.132; Lane, 1974, p.205).

Eradicating loose, localised job practices (see 9.3) is a mild expression of conservative coercive strategy aimed at re-asserting managerial control in changed economic conditions, but coercion may take more extreme forms such as lay-offs, redundancy and even plant closure. The severity of such strategies may, of course, lead to unintended consequences of great importance for understanding organisational politics. More recent history of industrial relations contains innumerable examples of waves of spasmodic or organised political resistance to coercion :

"In a situation ridden with latent conflicts, the decision to lay men off can be likened to a declaration of war". (Beynon, 1973, p.156).

Permanent factory closures have more serious repercussions for the work force, although such closures, or their threat, may have become part of the "international strategy" (Beynon, 1973, p.182) of multinational companies, as a defensive reaction to organised dissent and opposition. Recent experiences of factory occupations and worker cooperatives in shipbuilding, motorcycles and newspapers - to cite the most publicised cases - evidence unforeseen, highly organised political counterstrategies and responses<sup>6</sup> to this form of conservative strategy.

Under most circumstances, however, control may be maintained without engendering extreme political responses. The second conservative control strategy - "fragmentation" (Nichols and Beynon, 1977) or "sectionalisation" (Lane, 1974; Clements, 1977) - has mainly defensive purposes, in that it endeavours to prevent the possibility, or undermine the existence, of counter-organisation. Organised opposition to organisational control is a possibility rooted in the very co-operative nature of work in an industrial organisation; but the existence of divisions in the work force - temporal, spatial, occupational etc. - also allows for the accomplishment of political order by "divide and rule" tactics. Fragmentation as a conservative strategy of control involves the creation and enactment of techniques, practices etc. which both enhance rationality and discourage unification of opposition. (cf. Nichols and Beynon, 1977, p.107).

It is usually difficult to judge the intentionality of fragmentation, but there is little doubt that management are often *aware* of these consequences independent of their priority in the formulation of conservative strategy.

While physical/geographical and temporal fragmentation of the work force should not be underemphasised it is probably more informative to consider procedural or technical factors which sectionalise the work force. One well-documented practice is the operation of grading arrangements for job evaluation. On the one hand, such systems motivate participants to improve their performance in order to enhance their status or increase their pay. However, such arrangements inevitably advantage some participants or occupations to the detriment of others thus creating disagreements within a potential opposition (cf. Dreyfuss, 1952, pp.259-260; Beynon, 1973, p.160ff.; Nichols and Beynon, 1977, p.117; Burns, 1977, p.88ff.). Productivity deals operate similarly (e.g. Nichols and Armstrong, 1976, p.110ff.), and "fragmented and complicated wage structures" can act divisively even on members of the same trade union (Brown and Brannen, 1970, pp.201-202). Management may also

consider rotating personnel and work allocations in order to prevent the possible development of solidarity (cf. Pettigrew, 1973, p.145). Fragmentation is not restricted to capitalist industrial organisations: Lane (1974, pp.249-250) describes the strategic control advantages that British Trade Union leaders enjoy as a result of having and maintaining a sectionalised membership.

Fragmentation of the organisation's work force may be supplemented by politically engendered splits between the trade union rank-and-file and its shop floor leadership and organisation. For example, in Chemco (Nichols and Beynon, 1977, pp.113-114), the formal instituting of "check-off arrangements" for automatically collecting union subscriptions through wage adjustments at source permitted the trade union to operate a closed shop, but at the same time separated members from their shop steward (who is, of course, the traditional collector of dues). In addition to reinforcing socially the technical divisions of work, fragmentation often serves to introduce active squabbling or in-fighting between advantaged and disadvantaged sections of the work force, thus not only intensifying the lack of unity, but also having the unintended consequences of providing a focus for the politics of adaptation (see 9.3).

Strategies of "incorporation" (Nichols and Beyron, 1977) or "institutionalisation" - to use a much broader notion - consist of attempts to entangle participants within organisational rationality so that their (potential) power and opposition are maintained within the bounds of the system. By channelling opposition through formal procedures, it becomes routinised and defused. Institutionalisation of (class) conflict has been widely discussed at the societal level (cf. Dahrendorf, 1959) but little attention has been paid to it as a conscious conservative strategy of sustaining order within organisations.

In Chapter Seven, the proposition was made at the general structural level of analysis, that trade unions have become

entwined in the institutional logic of capitalism, but it has been suggested that employers and managers purposefully contrive to weaken potential opposition by a process akin to "formal co-optation" (Selznick, 1966, p.219ff.) :

"... the most progressive agents of capital seek to incorporate trade unions within a web of centralised procedures..." (Nichols and Beynon, 1977, p.108).

At Ford and at Chemco, trade unions became party to national agreements over pay and grading which were held to be binding on members whose views had not been consulted. By "participating" within the structural framework of the organisation (cf. Coates and Topham, 1974, p.143ff. on union participation at U.C.S.), unions became responsible for decisions which increased control over their members. By thus being incorporated within the system, union organisation no longer acted as a focus of conflict and resistance; a further political consequence is often to divide disillusioned members from informal shop-floor leadership (cf. Beynon, 1973, p.173) thereby increasing fragmentation.

The worker director scheme of British Steel constitutes another classic example of incorporation by participation. Other directors worked at "fitting the worker directors into the on-going framework" (Brannen et al., 1976, p.170), while, almost reciprocally, worker directors became enmeshed in the rationality of capitalist organisation - even when mass redundancies resulted by such a rationality.

"... during our period of observation at board meetings there was no instance in which the assumptions behind any [plant] closure were challenged... But the economic data presented by the directors appeared to be invested with impartiality and objectivity ... [and] whilst the figures 'talked for themselves' and the industry had to be made viable, redundancy

was essential". (Brannen et al., 1976, p.173).

The undeniability of the objective, economic necessity to make fellow workers redundant reflects the real strength behind conservative strategy, but the worker directors unquestioningly accepted the logic and the rules of the management game, and, through boardroom experience and training, even adopted the language of the prevailing rationality (Brannen et al., 1976, p.209 ; see also Ramsay, 1977 on the incorporative aspects of participation in general).

On a more personal level, management try to incorporate shop-floor leaders - particularly shop stewards - by providing office space and facilities (cf. Lane, 1974, pp.208-209); by influencing nomination and selection of stewards (cf. Nichols and Beynon, 1977, p.115); by secondment of stewards or representatives to training courses which stress their bureaucratic role within the present structural framework (cf. Brannen et al, 1976, p.130ff.); by promoting stewards to supervisory posts (cf. Lane, 1974, p.207) and so on. Where shop steward organisation provides a strong focus of opposition (independently of the union), managers may well establish special procedures specifically to routinise contacts and institutionalise conflict (cf. Poole, 1974, p.73).

For managements which believe that conflict is better expressed than left latent (i.e. those with a distinctly pluralistic perspective), the incorporation of opposition within organisational procedures has a further strategic purpose, viz.

"... to restrict discussions so far as possible to questions associated with welfare, safety, productivity and so on". (Poole, 1974, p.73; see also Brannen et al, 1976, p.35).

Supported by institutional definitions (and the dominant ideology in general) about the rights of ownership and control, it is conservative strategy to limit the arena for conflict to a

restricted number and type of questions viz. minor issues within the inviolate structural framework, rather than questions about the latter's assumptions. Such a "restrictionist" strategy often merely involves the enactment of procedures and regulations (and their legal and ideological underpinnings) which rule 'fundamental' structural questions as "unconstitutional", although the continuing debate about "nondecision-making" in communities (Bachrach and Baratz, 1963; see also Lukes, 1974; Crenson, 1971) raises increasingly complicated matters about the ways in which such a strategy is pursued and realised. In organisations it might be argued that conservative strategy is enhanced by making concessions on minor issues - thereby reinforcing the pluralist image - in order to conceal more fundamental issues, and to encourage the adoption of 'reformist' strategy as a means of political achievement (cf. Lane, 1974, pp.206-207).

### 9.2.3 Conservative Consensus Strategy

Underlying the use of all conservative control strategies is the dominant ideology which gives rationality and meaning to the technology of organisational control. The major strength of conservative strategy is that its ideological assumptions are so embedded in the notion of "organisational control" as to allow it to appear apolitical, the neutral operation of a rational instrument. Although starting from this advantage, it is evident from even a cursory glance at the behaviour of organisational participants, that conservative strategists cannot assume positive approval of the structural framework. In order to engender maximum acceptance of the organisational order and to minimise disruption of it, it is necessary to pursue conscious strategies of legitimisation. These consensus strategies seek to control the way participants interpret and "strategise" their work lives, appealing, at best, to the social legitimacy of the organisation, at worst to the fact that the latter exists as an unalterable state of affairs.

At their disposal, managers have all the organisation's means of communication - newsletters, meetings, other publicity

leaflets - and these methods are themselves supported by the external mass media. Organisational rationality is reinforced by institutional logic, the dominant ideology of the macro system. As Nichols and Beynon (1977, p.119) suggest, managers need to interpret the logic of capital in terms of ideas to which lower participants can relate. The most general way of doing this is to stress the compatibility between organisational values and standards and abstract cultural values to which it is assumed most participants subscribe - at least at a non-operational level. For example, the appeal to "humanistic" aspects of job enrichment reflects not only cultural trends in that direction, but also academic "human relations" theorising which, itself interwoven with cultural trends, imbues such arrangements with the socially legitimate scientific qualities of "impartiality" and "objectivity" (cf. Fox, 1974b, p.70ff.), whereas "job enrichment" has its ideological appeal to "humanising work"; the grading system appeals to individualism and achievement; the language of "participation" relates to democratic tradition; wage deals reflect cultural materialism. All these elements were present in Chemco's New Working Arrangement, and they coexist in differing combinations in various managerial packages designed primarily to increase control and rationality.

To summarise, factually and ideologically, managers are aided in their attempts to enact socially, and support politically, strategies which seek, often simultaneously and unintentionally, to both improve control of the work process, and limit the extent of opposition and challenge to the organisational order. However, it is highly improbable that management can successfully monopolise both "organisation" and "ideology", because conservative strategies and political action will have unintended effects on the political process, and will, in varying degrees, be purposefully resisted and opposed.

### 9.3 Reformist Strategy and the Politics of Organisational Adaptation

#### 9.3.1 Reformist Strategy and Reformist Strategists

A combination of theories from the pragmatic and oppositional modes is likely to be a very common occurrence in organisational life which provides its participants with ambivalent, even contradictory experiences. The incompleteness and lack of full commitment that typifies localised, restricted theorising of both the pragmatic and the oppositional kind, is associated with an instability which leads to multiple, 'inconsistent' images of the organisation. Reformist strategy is rooted in imagery that casts the organisation as both hostile and benign, constraining and promising i.e. in the day-to-day problems of surviving in a system which creates discomfort and yet is perceived as unalterable and permanent. Whereas conservative strategy reflects an active interest in maintaining and improving the structural framework *as it is*, reformist strategy concerns the active manipulation of the structural framework in order to resolve perceived local or limited issues, whilst leaving unasked and untouched fundamental questions about organisational rationality. The very existence of rules, authority, procedures, practices etc. presupposes the possibility that they may be strategically used, or even evaded, in order to improve an actor's (individual's or group's) social possibilities, or reduce his social impossibilities. Since reformist strategy is concerned with restricted adjustments of the system (and their defense) I shall refer to its enactment as the politics of adaptation.

The politics of adaptation corresponds more or less to the total view of political process offered by pluralist or political-conflict theorists. The advantage of the present approach is that reformist strategies and adaptive politics are placed firmly in the context of other essential aspects of organisational politics, viz. structurally predisposed tendencies towards order and conflict, and the concrete ways in which order and opposition are, or potentially may be, realised and frustrated.

Reformist strategy and the associated actions cover a vast range of localised politics, from the passive resistance that typifies more or less apathetic pragmatists, to active struggle and opposition over day-to-day affairs, which are more typical of quasi-committed oppositional theorists, bordering on alternative theorising.<sup>7</sup> The considerable variation of strategy and political action that characterises this range of reformist strategy points to the need for empirical research - and in sections 9.3.2 and 9.3.3 I shall refer to the problem with respect to managerial and work-place strategies - but I suggest that all strategies and actions within the range have broad similarities by virtue of their limited aims and their inconsistent base.

In 9.2.1, I argued that conservative strategies are employed throughout the organisation, but both evidence and intuition suggests that they belong mainly to top participants whose power is structurally buttressed. Strategies of reform, however, can and do arise at all levels of the organisation, have similar aims, and may be considered as rational means of attempting to manipulate the "facts of organisational life" to suit particular ends. In 8.6, I proposed that localised inconsistent theorising tends to reflect participants' often ambiguous or contradictory experiences of work and (capitalist) organisation. Effectively writing of the strategic aspects of inconsistent theorising ("factory-based class consciousness"), Beynon suggests the following of the shop stewards' committee at Halewood :

"... shop stewards were active *trade unionists*, and their shop stewards' committee was a trade union *organisation*. Activism and organisation held together by a class consciousness that derives its politics from a detailed understanding of relationships within the factory. A politics that finds its expression in 'taking the piss' out of the foremen, in a laugh and joke, and in the strike. A politics that is structured by ambivalence.

A dislike and distrust of the employer but a need for employment". (Beynon, 1973, p.23).

The ambivalent experiences of organisational life from which localised inconsistent theorising is distilled and of which the latter attempts to make sense, are not located solely in the lower echelons of the organisation such as among shop floor stewards (Beynon, 1973, p.121; Lane, 1974, p.197), manual workers (Nichols and Armstrong, 1976, p.150ff.; Brown and Brannen, 1970, p.207; Westergaard, 1970, p.121), foremen (Nicholls, 1974, p.496ff.), staff stewards (Batstone et al., 1977, pp.26-27) and clerks (Lockwood, 1958, p.99ff.). Top managers and executives also confront ambivalence: they have to "manage the contradictions" (Nichols and Beynon, 1977, p.130) which conservative strategies may unintentionally create (see 9.2.4), and to do so often requires informal and non-legitimate "juggling" (Nichols and Beynon, 1977, p.33; see also Clegg, 1975, p.91ff.) or innovation. Within management circles themselves, organisational rationality produces structural conflict by working in two opposing directions :

"Members of the management team must cooperate and *compete* to serve their own ends... The competitive element concerns the desire for promotion and for greater shares of scarce resources" (Lowe and Shaw, 1968, p.305; see also Martin, 1977, pp.104-105).

Given that the organisation is a competitive career structure, that managers and executives are *themselves* subject to evaluation of performance, that competition for organisational resources is structured into their lives, and that organisational control involves teamwork and conflict,<sup>8</sup> it is inevitable that even top executives

"... manoeuvre and manipulate in order to get the job done and, in many cases, to strengthen and enhance their own position. Although they would

hate the thought and deny the allegation, the fact is that they are politicians". (Martin and Sims, 1964, p.217).

The politics of adaptation include actions that adjust the system wittingly and formally, or unintentionally and informally (cf. Strauss, 1964, p.245), from an individual or a collectivity power-base, with positive opposition or defensive resistance. As with all political strategy the chances of the successful accomplishment of reformist strategies will depend not only on their internal coherence and accurate projections, but also upon social resistance from other actors, the unintended repercussions of the various courses of action pursued in the organisational arena, and, at least as important, the "assistance" strategists receive from structural possibilities or lack of structural impossibilities. In the latter case specifically, one would expect managerial reformist strategies to have better initial chances of success,<sup>9</sup> in spite of their general theoretical similarity to those of lower participants.

Wherever it occurs, reformist strategy is a response to problems whose solutions are sought at a localised level. Where problems are perceived as social (i.e. created more or less *ad hocly* within the work situation) rather than structural (i.e. symptomatic of the way the system works) strategies and political actions will tend to be piecemeal, limited, sectionalist, non- or quasi-legitimate, and competitive. However, as I shall argue below, there is reason to believe that adaptive politics at the management level differ in certain important respects from those at lower levels. In general these differences arise because of the participants' relationship to the structural framework and its rationality, and their theorised experiences of it. In short, managers have greater structural potential for self-control (see 7.3) and tend to adopt reformist strategies with a primarily pragmatic base - this in turn leads to political actions being undertaken from an individual or small clique viewpoint with great opportunities of some success. On the other hand, shop floor workers do not have structurally-predisposed control possibilities, and the fulcrum of their strategic plans may

be either pragmatic or oppositional; in general, in order to achieve any success, adaptive politics in the workplace cannot be rooted in organisational rationality, but in some other localised logic, e.g. social solidarity.

Being 'nonideological', adaptive political actions will tend to be formulated according to *control* rather than consensus strategies, i.e. they will attempt to influence the 'facts' (rules, procedures, practices etc.) of the immediate organisational situation. As with all control strategies, those of the reformist kind will have positive and defensive purposes and consequences. Positive control strategies refer to plans to increase one's (social) possibilities beyond those structurally defined; defensive control strategies aim to maintain those politically-earned possibilities against attempts by others to challenge or reduce them.<sup>10</sup> These positive ("aggressive") and defensive aspects of reformist strategies have been well-documented in the work of Dalton and Burns (see Chapter Three), especially at the managerial level. It is at this level that I shall continue my exploration of adaptive politics.

### 9.3.2 Reformist Strategy at the Managerial Level

In all organisations, higher participants enjoy an initial advantage in their ability to increase their personal or group control by manipulating institutional authority, rules, discretion, and information and by manoeuvring within the career system (regarding union leaders, see Lane, 1974, pp.252-253). Having greater access to the control system and greater freedom from it, higher participants - top managers, executives and professionals - can exploit and expand their position in order to increase power and status beyond structural allocation, and they do so by adopting positive control strategies. Politically-acquired status and power in a competitive organisational world need defensive strategies in order to protect them for other individuals or groups seeking to expand *their* possibilities.

Two of the most familiar and powerful reasons for adopting managerial reformist strategies are predisposed by the structural framework of organisational power. First, careerism or self-advancement (cf. Burns, 1977, p.106ff.) reflects the competitive system of promotion which seeks to channel highly motivated and able participants to the top of the organisation. However, unintentionally, it creates conflict and struggle between ambitious managers and executives whose aims are not to increase organisational rationality and control, but to increase their own social possibilities (cf. Stagner, 1968, pp.186-187). A second and related reason concerns "expansionism" or "empire-building" (Burns and Stalker, 1961, p.194ff.). The expansionist manager aims to extend his department or subunit - in size, power or status - with respect to other departments, thereby increasing the perceived importance of himself and his staff - and, not incidentally, to improve his promotion possibilities.

The positive manipulation of the organisational control system in order to serve sectional or personal ends has been widely discussed in the literature. Where it helps to achieve one's goals a rule may be religiously followed (cf. Strauss, 1964, p.23ff.; Crozier, 1964, p.160 and p.199), or interpreted to serve a purpose (cf. Clegg, 1975, p.132ff.) or even evaded altogether (cf. Dubin, 1968; Strauss, 1964, p.235ff.; Dalton, 1959, pp.111-113). Institutional authority provides a legitimate base from which rules and procedures may be manipulated, and job discretion, with its inbuilt freedom from external control, makes it difficult for supervisors to identify and specify points at which control possibilities have been strategically acquired. Discretion is an important part of organisational rationality, but it also provides the role occupant with

"... power against top management in the sense that he could, if he chose, use his job discretion... in ways which could do it considerable harm" (Fox, 1974b, p.44).

In this way, managerial reformist strategy which uses the structural framework, is not only grounded in the structural framework but also protected by it.

A more striking illustration of adaptive politics at the level of management is the intentional biasing of information in order to either increase control possibilities and/or defend against threats to such earned control.

"It is clear that ... [area managers] saw it in their personal interest to obtain lower rather than higher budgets ... [The] reward system had the effect of inducing ... [area managers] to bias their forecasts downwards ... in order to improve their future income."  
(Lowe and Shaw, 1968, p.307 and p.308).

Such biasing acted to improve income, and similarly raised the prestige and potential power of area managers with regard to the available funds in the organisation. In Lowe and Shaw's study (1968), this strategy of control also had defensive aspects because, feeling threatened with possible demotion, area managers "dressed up" or favourably distorted the budgetary information that was used by superiors to assess their performance. (cf. Loasby, 1968, pp.359-360; Dubin, 1968, p.435; Jasinski, 1968, p.439). The ways in which the "doctoring" of information is achieved depends upon the loopholes in the (budgetary) control system of the particular organisation (cf. Pondy, 1965, pp.1-2) but in general it is clear that managers can and do distort information to serve personal or sectional ends - positive and defensive.

The career system, with its grading arrangements and appointments/appeals procedures, can also become the direct focus

of positive control strategy. From the perspective of a professional group of specialists, for example, the appropriate combination of tactical skill and group support can permit the manipulation of the grading system to its own advantage :

"The secretary of one major trade union said that the BBC grading system was God's own gift to his union. It certainly enables groups of specialists to manoeuvre themselves into higher grading by exploiting the openings presented by shifts in the technical or organisational setting, or in the grading system itself." (Burns, 1977, p.89).

Playing the strategic game of "boardsmanship" (ibid. p.115ff.) may appear a harmless pastime for the career-minded, but where candidates become allied to, and supported and sponsored by "cabal"-like groups (Burns, 1955, p.480ff.; cf. Martin and Sims, 1964, pp.219-220; Dalton, 1959, pp.62-63), an intellectual quasi-political game becomes a fully-fledged political manipulation of the system.

As in the previous illustration, grading and status are also subject to defensive strategy from those individuals and groups who are threatened by changes in the system. Pettigrew's computer programmers (1973, p.147ff.) and Burns' insecure older managers (1955, p.473ff.) employed tactics based upon group solidarity in order to attempt to protect themselves against erosion of power and status.

The examples cited illustrate how higher participants use the structural possibilities implicit in their positions to manipulate for sectionalist ends the structural framework from which they derive their control potential. Positive control strategies involve explicit manoeuvres to increase their power, income and status, whilst defensive control strategies are designed to resist challenges to those socially-generated possibilities. The higher one climbs the organisational ladder the more possible it is for participants to introduce important adjustments by themselves for themselves, but, for most managers, adaptation can only be accomplished with some socio-political support.

### 9.3.3 Reformist Strategy at the Workplace

Like managers and executives, shop-floor and office workers are seldom satisfied with the control and freedom structurally allocated to them, although few feel that they can do anything positive about it (cf. Nichols and Armstrong, 1976, p.64; Femia, 1975, p.33). Unlike top participants, shopfloor and office workers do not have the initial structural advantages of authority, discretion, access to information, realistic career possibilities etc. Lacking a power-base in organisational rationality reformist strategy at the workplace draws strength mainly from the collectivity, using it to manipulate the structural framework in order to establish direct control over the work process. As before, such control strategy may be analysed as possessing positive and defensive aspects. I shall be focusing upon shopfloor politics for illustrative purposes; because of the plethora of research at the "frontier of control" (Goodrich, 1975), I shall restrict discussion to a few general points.

I have argued above that managerial reformist strategy may be expected to be formulated from a primarily pragmatic base of theorising, whereas the reformist strategy of lower participants is likely to be both pragmatic and oppositional. This latter duality is reflected in Nichols and Armstrong's distinction between "getting

by" and "getting back" (1976, p.69ff.). At its most blatant, "getting back" is a negative, emotional expression of resentment which finds its extreme in spasmodic, uncoordinated acts of sabotage. Often being individualistic<sup>11</sup> responses to control and constraint - associated often with "bloody-minded" participants - such acts tend not to have sustained effects on the process of organisational politics (see also Taylor and Walton, 1971). Similarly, workers make their own individual adjustments to and of their situations (i.e. getting by) according to their particular jobs, but being very small adaptations on an unorganised basis they tend to go unnoticed, and be of little political import.

The most relevant examples of reformist strategy on the shopfloor concern coordinated, group-based attempts to influence the amount of control workers have over their own activities; these job practices in a sense combine "getting by" and "getting back" in an *organised* manner. Most of the recorded illustrations of workplace adaptive politics involve the control of wages.<sup>12</sup> Concerned with making a "fair day's pay" *in spite of* organisational rationality as enacted by management, piecework workers employ a range of tactics to improve a job's return: "scheming and conniving" on the timing of a job (Roy, 1969, pp.362-363; also Beynon, 1973, p.135ff.); "streamlining" a job, thereby sacrificing quality for quantity (Roy, 1969, pp.363; on supervisors' "bleeding the line" to meet deadlines, see Jasinski, 1968, p.439); the informal coordination of tasks in order to make "hopeless" jobs worthwhile (Roy, 1969, p.368; also Lupton's discussion of the "fiddle", 1963, p.139ff.). Attempts to increase or stabilise earnings are complemented by strategies which aim to improve other aspects of working life including job grading (e.g. Beynon, 1973, p.129ff.) and exercising control over work allocation (Beynon, 1973, p.147). One might add, of course, that sectionalist interests also involve and create intergroup conflicts in the office or on the shop floor (e.g. wage disputes; demarcation disputes), thereby having significance for the realisation of conservative strategies of fragmentation (cf. Brown and Brannen, 1970, pp.202 and 203).

Shopfloor practices flourish most freely where the industrial organisation enjoys a certain, preferably expanding market, for it is at this time that work groups can push for increased control which does not squeeze the management economically. Organised expansion of shopfloor control, whether under trade union auspices and shop steward leadership (cf. Beynon, 1973, p.129ff; Coates and Topham, 1974, p.76ff.; Lane, 1974, p.200) or through intergroup collusion (cf. Roy, 1969; Lupton, 1963), can proceed steadily until the market begins to squeeze, or until, in some other way, management begin to feel threatened e.g. with respect to their "right to manage" (e.g. Beynon, 1973, p.134; Roy, 1969, p.370ff.). The durability of job controls depends upon conservative strategy in varying economic-historical circumstances, but when the market tightens, so does the flexibility of the politics of order, and hard-earned shopfloor controls need to be defended - as they do when challenged by other occupational groups. Lacking a structural (i.e. organisationally rational) basis to its controls, political resistance, other things being equal, is mainly a matter of social solidarity and collective recalcitrance (e.g. Crozier, 1964, p.110; Scheff, 1970, pp.335-337) combined with the exploitation of any particular managerial dependence upon one's goodwill<sup>13</sup> - solitary acts of sabotage (see note 11) or "work-to-rule" exemplify such defensive control tactics.

All reformist strategies, then, are oriented towards "working the system" (cf. Goffman, 1961, p.189ff.) to sectionalist advantage, increasing power in the work situation by manipulating or evading rules and controls, by optimising remuneration, by playing the grading arrangements or whatever. These strategies try to use the system to improve or protect social possibilities (and to minimise social impossibilities) *within* the system.

However :

"Essentially the controls obtained over the job by shopfloor... activities involved little more than a different form of accommodation to the more general controls imposed by management".  
(Beynon, 1973, p.149).

In this general respect, shopfloor politics differ little from those at management level. However, as mentioned above, there are important differences.

The adaptive politics of higher participants are grounded in structurally-based possibilities, their expansion, exploitation and defense. Due to their position, politically favoured as it is by organisational rationality, executives, managers and professionals have a structural buffer to changing economic-historical conditions. As the market tightens, higher participants can to some extent maintain politically-accomplished controls longer and more completely, if only because politically-generated control and freedom are often difficult to separate from structural-discretionary elements of a role. On the other hand, the expansion and defense of workers' control possibilities need to be supported by a *collective rationality*. The "commonsense rationality of workers in the work situation" (Beynon) lies not in the institutional logic of capitalism or the formal rationality of organisation, but in a collective logic - one of solidarity.

Discussion in 8.6 centred on the proposition that restricted theorising - particularly when it involves inconsistency - exhibits features of instability that could, under certain circumstances lead to shifts in the way in which organisational life is interpreted. Reformist strategy embodies such potentialities. The argument that workplace adaptive politics need to have roots in a localised collective logic hints once more at empirical possibilities viz. that if such a logic becomes generalised, it may serve as an alternative rationality of which revolutionary strategy becomes a normal political extension.

#### 9.4 Revolutionary Strategy and the Politics of Organisational Change

##### 9.4.1 Revolutionary Strategy and Revolutionary Strategists

Revolutionary strategy incorporates in its intentions the dilemma of alternative theorising already described (see 8.5), viz.

while it is perfectly feasible in an organisation to interpret, plan and act "normatively" - for both such political "theory" and political "practice" have institutional support and credibility - it is impractical (i.e. institutionally and organisationally impossible) to act out persistently the demands of an alternative theory. A full analysis of revolutionary strategy in organisations must bear in mind this political dilemma, and consider the ways in which revolutionary strategists seek to resolve it.

Alternative theorising provides a critical analysis of organisational life *and* the structural framework which circumscribes the latter, from the standpoint of another way of organising society and work. The commitment to an alternative rationality becomes politically relevant when theorists plan courses of action with the direct intention of challenging, and ultimately overthrowing the present system. Because of the dilemma mentioned above, it is not probable that revolutionary strategy will inform all the organisational action of the revolutionary strategist, but where it does, we may speak of the politics of change. Whereas conservative strategy may be seen as the social endeavour to enact the structural predispositions towards organisational order, revolutionary strategy may be understood as the socio-political counterpart to structural conflict, i.e. the active attempt to realise the structural potential for organisational change.

As I have suggested (see 8.5), empirical evidence regarding alternative theorising and revolutionary strategy is sparse for various reasons. Most considerations of the politics of radical organisational (or social) change is either highly abstract theoretical work and/or studies of the *failure* of such politics e.g. the structural limitations to political change by active trade unionism. Because of this I do not intend to be very thorough in my discussion of revolutionary strategy; indeed I shall make only very general points to demonstrate how it fits in with the themes already suggested. The main purpose of doing this is to overcome a fundamental weakness of most previous approaches to organisational power and politics, viz. their neglect or oversight of this theoretical category and of its empirical possibilities.

Because revolutionary political strategy derives from a thoroughgoing critique of the structural framework in its broadest sense, the politics of radical *organisational* change must be analysed within the broader societal/institutional context. Revolutionary strategy, being generalised and seeking change is identifiably ideological because it challenges the institutional assumptions and logic which seem to be neutral and obvious. Unlike conservative strategy which appears 'apolitical' or reformist strategy which is deemed 'political', revolutionary strategy is definitely Political.<sup>14</sup> Since radical organisational change is seen as only one aspect of social change, revolutionary strategy is likely to have its social foundation not *in* the organisation but in some extra-organisational movement. Lenin's critique of trade unionism, with its conclusion that structural change can only be achieved through Political organisation, and the practical impossibility of radical workers realising their political aims on or from the shop-floor (cf. Lane, 1974), serves to underline the significance of the extra-organisational roots of revolutionary strategy (cf. Parkin, 1972, p.97ff; Clements, 1977, p.318ff.; Anderson, 1977, p.341ff.; Contrast Moorhouse and Chamberlain, 1974 and Moorhouse, 1976). Whilst it is imperative to understand this point, my concern with the internal politics of organisations makes it unfeasible to conduct a *comprehensive* analysis of radical politics and Party organisation. I shall explore some of the implications of revolutionary strategy for the process of organisational politics.

Amongst organisational participants, revolutionary strategy is rare, and where revolutionary strategists are participants they are not likely to be able to profess or practice their views to any significant degree. As with conservative strategists their views and acts will be assessed by different participants in different ways according to the latter's theorised experiences of everyday organisational life. In the political arena, where the current ways of doing things have a facticity, a self-evidence and a desirability - actively supported by conservative consensus strategies within the organisation (as well as other legitimation processes outwith the organisation) - the revolutionary strategist faces immense political barriers. He competes with his conservative counterpart for

ideological commitment, but the competition is heavily structurally biased. In moments of hegemonic order, organisational participants are likely to be both unreceptive and hostile to the politics of change. It is only when structural conflict becomes more visible - for example, where domination prevails - that the possibility of an organised collective challenge to the structural framework arises, for it is then that the alternative conflict-based interpretation of organisational life becomes most tenable for the uncommitted.<sup>15</sup>

In spite of the structural and social biases against the politics of radical organisational change, revolutionaries face the same basic problems as conservative strategists. The first of these concerns the establishment of a coherent organisation to pursue their rationality and to effect control of work life i.e. the need for control strategy. Second, the need to persuade (i.e. to "educate") participants about the legitimacy of changing the structural framework, i.e. consensus strategy. By presenting a viable alternative explanation of participants' experiences of organisations and thereby establishing a "*counter-hegemony*", and binding localised conflicts into a broadly-based *organisation*, collective logic can defeat the dominant institutional logic.

Revolutionaries are not totally free to pursue these questions of organisation and education, because they are involved in an unequal political struggle for the commitment of the majority of organisational participants. The heart of the revolutionary strategist's problem lies in the highly restricted awareness of social actors :

"The very framework of his analysis of the existing system is fixed by the dominant vision of the world. The apparent limits of the possible are defined by the existing order." (Femia, 1975, p.33).

Organisational participants have to be able to experience their own work lives in conflict terms; they have to be able to experience

such conflict not just as economic or other minor (e.g. health, safety) issues, but as political issues; political conflict over organisational control and rationality must be generalised beyond localised "faults" to structural/societal causes, i.e. Political conflict; the structural framework - its "facts" and "ideology" - must be interpreted as being vulnerable, contingent and not "fixed", and replaceable by an alternative framework with a more acceptable rationality. These general aims of revolutionary strategy, combined with the need to organise the political challenge, form the foci of revolutionary control and consensus strategy.

#### 9.4.2 Revolutionary Control Strategy

Control strategy within an alternative mode of theorising attempts to reduce or negate the control and rationality produced through the politics of order. Because it seeks radical change in the organisation and rationality of work through broader societal change, revolutionary strategy cannot derive any power from the "routine", "obvious" organisational embodiments of the structural framework. As with other control strategy, it is possible to consider the revolutionary kind as having two aspects: in its positive sense, revolutionary control strategy actively challenges the dominant way of organising work by trying to realise socially and politically those system contradictions which imply a generalised collective opposition; defensively, such strategy resists attempts by conservatives to destroy an effective organisational and ideological base for challenge and opposition (see 9.2.2). Like their conservative counterpart, the revolutionary control strategy is in reality imbued with ideology so that it overlaps with consensus strategy, which seeks to alter participants' perceptions of their organisational world. It should be remembered that the political actions of revolutionary strategists in organisations are only part of their broader aims; and their organisational success depends upon their societal strategy, as well as conservative and reformist responses and the unintended consequences of the whole process.

The most immediate task is to break the management's monopoly of knowledge and rationality. There is evidence to suggest that shop stewards with active socialist politics attempt to do this by deliberately conceiving their steward's job as a mediating *interpretive* role. By intercepting management communications - the face-value of which, in the context of a dominant ideology, is "reasonable" - the socialist steward can translate the message in terms of the underlying *political* strategy of managerial control (Lane, 1974, p.200). At the daily organisational level, strategic intervention of this nature serves to promulgate actively a political interpretation of management's apparently neutral actions and at the same time to establish some degree of resistance to the latter's structurally-based attempts to monopolise organisation and knowledge.

In discussing the other types of political strategy, it was argued that participants often experience the organisation in conflict terms, but that its intermingling with order theorising and the tendency to restrict their perception of conflict to limited, localised, sectional and usually economistic issues (itself encouraged by conservative strategy) channel the collective energy produced into adaptive processes. Revolutionary strategy aims to exploit localised issues which create conflict and resentment - wage claims, lay-offs, redundancies etc. - and are theorised solely in oppositional terms, by taking active steps to generalise the participants' understanding of them. Any dispute which challenges organisational rationality in its own terms may thus be turned into a potential issue for change - especially where it involves a large number of people and has general solidarity amongst fellow participants because it contravenes their "commonsense" rationality and morality. Positive tactics need to be complemented by defensive ones, in order to resist conservative strategies of, for example, fragmentation and restrictionism. Positive strategy to demonstrate the structural causes of organisational conflict may include the militant pursuit of wage bargaining, or an organised demand for greater shop-floor control - through mass walk-outs, factory occupation, local strikes, industry-wide strikes, demonstrations etc. and these may have consequences beyond adaptation if they occur in favourable economic conditions, if they increase the

conflict awareness of participants beyond the immediate issue, if they overcome sectionalist perspectives; in short, if the local issues can be collectively interpreted as *Political*. However, control strategy needs to be complemented by strategies to inculcate and legitimate everyday theories which permit such an interpretation.

#### 9.4.3 Revolutionary Consensus Strategy

Underlying control strategy is an ideological theory about society, the nature of social conflict, and the possibilities of structural change. But the problem of the revolutionary is to create in participants a commitment to overthrow the organisation which provides for their survival - on an interpretive level, this entails questioning the unquestionable in terms of a rationality which has no comparable facticity. Although alternative rationality and ideology is not a formal part of the 'factual' organisational setting, they may be found in embryo in the localised collective logic which bolsters some forms of reformist strategy (cf. Moorhouse, 1976, p.492). It is the aim of consensus strategy to generalise this logic and to use it as a means of creating a radical opposition which is organised within a social movement.

It is imperative, therefore, for revolutionary strategists to join with their conservative opponents in the "battle for the minds and wills of the men". This in turn requires campaigns within and outwith the organisation to "educate" participants to be able to interpret organisational issues structurally and to understand the vulnerability of the structural framework when challenged collectively. Not only are such campaigns unfavourably predisposed because of the lack of access to large-scale means of communication, but also, and relatedly, because of the apparent 'naturalness' of prevailing ideas.

Lacking empirical data to illustrate these arguments about

revolutionary strategy and the politics of radical change, it has been necessary to draw out sensitising themes in a manner which is patently inadequate. Information about internal radical politics and their relationship to external Political Organisation would add enormously to our knowledge of the potentialities for organisational change through collective action, although clearly the realisation of such empirical possibilities, grounded in historical-economic, structural and social factors, depends upon a "mass" conversion to some degree of conflict awareness. The circumstances under which such large-scale re-orientation of everyday organisational theorising may occur cannot be specified in detail, but they certainly require some combination of positive strategy to make active progress, of defensive strategy to resist conservative strategies, and, possibly most important, of consensus strategy to legitimate the social critique and the structural alternative and to motivate relatively uncommitted participants to collective, organised action on a societal scale.

#### 9.5 Political Strategy, Political Action and Political Process

My aim throughout Part Three has been to focus upon how organisational participants theorise their work lives with reference to problems of control, order and conflict. Such theorising, dialectically related the structural framework of organisational power and the experiences which participants have of the latter, may be analysed, first, in its interpretive aspect as providing images of the ways in which organisations do and/or should work; and second, with respect to the political strategies which those images of order and/or conflict imply. In this way everyday organisational theorising provides a complex but necessary sociological variable that mediates the structural framework, participants' experiences of the latter, and courses of action strategically and intentionally adopted in order to accomplish political ends varying from committed support of, to committed opposition to the organisation, its control and rationality.

The immediate work of the thesis - to build an interpretive sociological *base* for the analysis of organisational power and politics - is thus finished, in that I have offered a set of theoretical concepts and propositions, supported by illustrative evidence, which can sensitise research on this topic from this perspective. A short, final section is however required to complete the theoretical picture. A sensitising framework for the analysis of organisational politics needs to take the sociological view beyond that of political strategies in which participants *attempt or plan* to realise certain ends. I have made it clear that such plans may obtain structural "help" or "hindrance" according to their relationship to the prevailing conditions, and that they may indeed be reformulated to take cognisance of such experiences. However, the *political process* of organisations cannot be assumed to reflect some predictable "combination" of pursued courses of political action, however flexible or adaptive.

The political arena of organisations is circumscribed by the factual and ideological, societal and localised, aspects of the structural framework which favour or disfavour certain actions by certain participants. Strategic political actions, theorised in accordance with participants' past and present experiences, tested ideas, political ends and social images, collectively "fill" the political arena and thereby form a socially-constructed network of action. Political action may succeed or fail dependent on whether it is structurally realistic (i.e. possible) or not, or whether it is socio-politically (i.e. intentionally) approved or supported by other strategists whose plans are equally subject to structural predispositions.

This socially-constructed network of political action may be seen as the social outcome of political strategists - what may be expected by a sociologist who has been able to accumulate information about participants' interpretive and strategic activities. But the *political process* of organisations is created not only by actors realising (or not) their intentions according to the intentional activities of challenge, support and opposition in a

structurally-circumscribed arena; its shape and path is also the result of the unforeseen effects of political actions, and the unanticipated repercussions of intentions meeting other intentions.

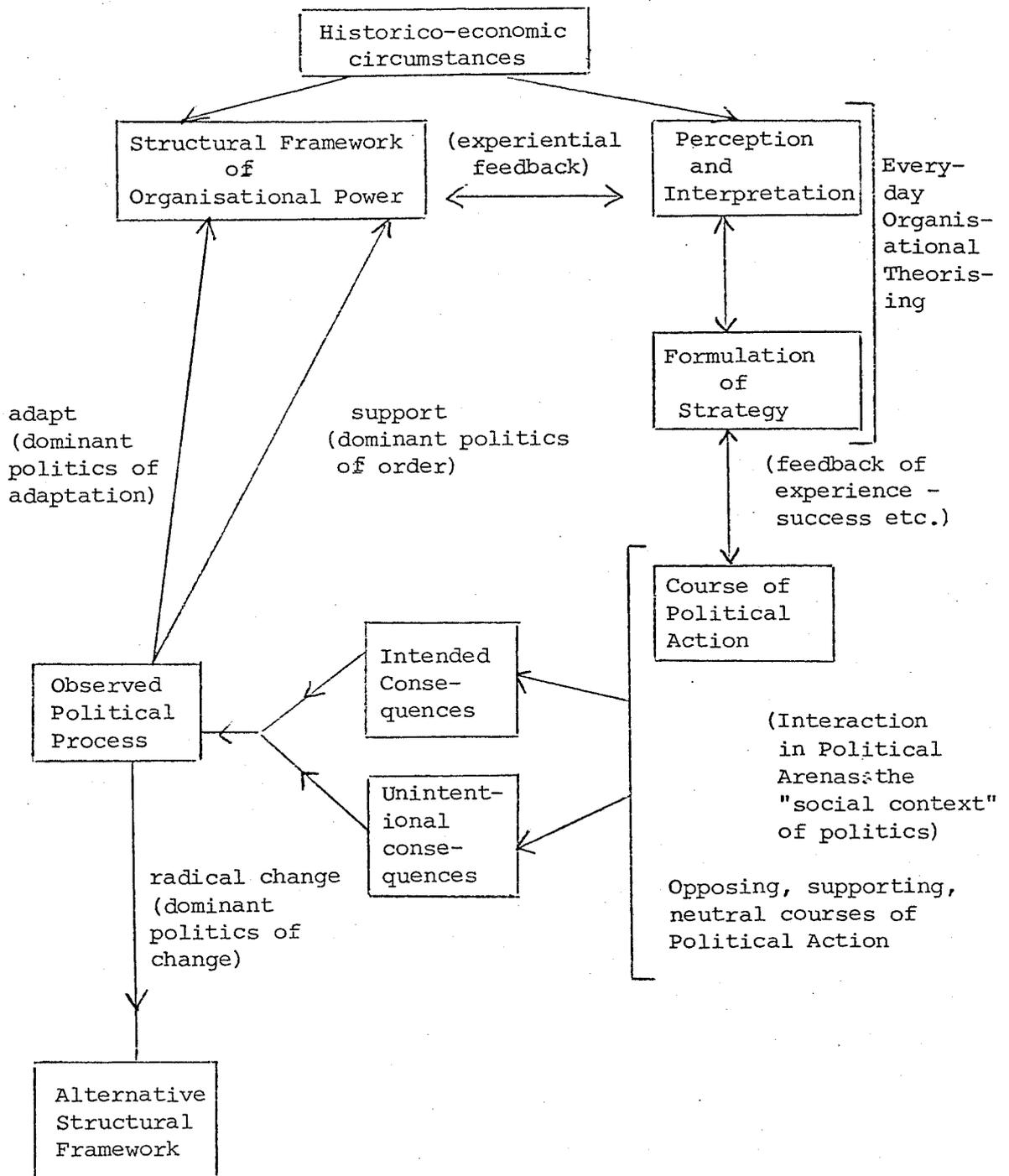
There is no space in this thesis to investigate in depth the implications and complications for organisational politics of the unintended consequences of political action and of the interaction between the politics of order, of adaptation and of radical change, but the importance of "unintentions" must never be underrated (cf. Atkinson, 1972, p.229ff.; see also 10.2.2 below). Whereas 'intentionality' in social action can be examined theoretically, unintended consequences of action are not so readily open to *a priori* discussion. Although such consequences are unanticipated, hence not 'theoretically' predicted by *social actors*, they may sometimes be expected by the sociologist whose academic theories have been sensitive to similar sets of empirical circumstances. For the most part, the ramifications of "unintentions" for the political process - and these consequences may conceivably alter the whole nature of organisational politics especially if they become cumulative - are a matter for detailed empirical research.

To conclude this chapter, I shall give one fairly simple example of a chain reaction of intended and unintended consequences which draws upon some of the ideas developed above: it is in Burns' study of the BBC (1977, p.87ff.). For purposes of increasing control and motivation, management introduced a new grading system, using a number of criteria to rank jobs for seniority, responsibility and pay. This conservative strategy, however, had unanticipated consequences, in that the grading system became the focus of discontent, and of reformist strategy to improve pay and status within the procedure. Through organised pressure and manipulation of the rules and criteria, the lighting supervisors achieved an up-grading, but this political success had repercussions throughout the organisation. For example, sound supervisors, formally on the same grade as the lighting supervisors, immediately commenced manoeuvres to regain parity. It can be seen that, although political action is *always* intentional, the actual process of organisational politics

depends upon the complicated, often unpredictable effects of those actions as they interrelate within a social and structural context.

In Part Three I have taken up the major conceptual themes of Parts One and Two, and have developed them as analytical foci for the study of organisational politics. I have examined the interrelationships between the structural (second face) and action (first face) dimensions of power and politics, between order and conflict in those two dimensions, and between opportunity and constraint; all this has been conducted under the auspices of the uncontended postulate of voluntarism. This has led to a deliberate concentration on everyday organisational theorising as the mediating variable which makes sense, for participants and, by implication, for academic sociologists, of the apparent oppositions and contradictions in the above analytical axes. By adding the study of unintended consequences of socio-political actions to that described above, it is possible to reach a coherent, realistic picture of the political process in organisational life *without* foreclosing on future empirical responsibilities. Figure 9.2 presents the concepts and propositions of the sensitising interpretive sociological framework as developed during Part Three .

Figure 9.2 A Simplified Representation of the Arguments Presented  
in Part Three



NOTES

1. Crenson's study of nondecision-making in a local community (1971) demonstrates how the powerful interests of industry entered into the formulation of antipollution legislation without taking direct action - the local politicians and functionaries perceived the impossibility of generating support for effective legislation, and so incorporated into their strategies their previous experience of structural predispositions that had been socially realised.
2. The political strategies of many international revolutionary groups appear to have been based upon such misperceptions of what could be done. In spite of their persistent historical experiences reinforcing the structural and social limits to the success of hi-jacking, kidnapping etc. as revolutionary tactics, revolutionary groups have continued to act ineffectively as political agents of structural change.
3. I would distinguish these from "habitually", because habits can and do change, and they were consciously subjectively "meaningful" at some stage in the past, and, presumably, still are now, even if they are not reflected upon (cf. Giddens, 1976, p.76ff.).
4. This argument introduces the historical dimension of conservative strategy, for until fairly recently organisations were controlled in fairly direct, coercive ways - it being historically and culturally unthinkable that owners and managers should even worry about lower participants' reactions to authority, control etc. Trade union organisation, full employment, cultural change, and economic pressures for rationalisation, are just four factors generating the need for managers to think about the problem of consensus. See Fox (1974b, p.46ff.) for general arguments, and Brannen et al. (1976) for a specific example.
5. The improvement or streamlining of the control system in order to enhance its rationality may also be considered part of the politics of order. Where improvements or additions are made to the control system, of course, conservative strategy is more likely to provoke political challenge because intentionality is no longer camouflaged by routine and tradition.
6. It should be added, of course, that such counter-strategies often go beyond the 'political' with a small 'p'. Worker-

6. (cont'd)  
run organisations, for example, have needed Politically-backed aid.
7. Indeed, in many ways, the extreme oppositional theorist with only restricted consciousness is indistinguishable in his behaviour from the alternative theorist who finds that, in practice and in the short run, he has to act within the system. (cf. Lane, 1974; and below, 9.4).
8. Fletcher (1973) provides a highly illuminating discussion of the internal contradictions of being a modern manager.
9. It is important to bear in mind the fuzziness of the distinction between the politics of order and of adaptation. The former relates to the formally legitimate enactment of structural predispositions and the pursuit of *organisational* control (i.e. rationality). Yet, higher participants are often in a position where they can manipulate the system to their own advantage, *and* simultaneously claim formal legitimacy. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that sometimes the very enactment of structural predispositions is at the same time achieving or realising sectionalist interests.
10. As argued earlier, the later (see 9.5) - I believe that it is a point worthy of reiteration - these propositions about reformist strategy and adaptive political action make no presumption about the success of such efforts. Since any strategy will normally have political repercussions on, and provoke reactions from other actors and groups, strategic success (and the course of the organisational political process *in toto*) depends upon one's own and other's intentions, structural "help" and the unanticipated consequences arising from the pursuit of political strategies.
11. Sabotage need not be individualistic, of course. Beynon (1973, p.141) describes a mild form of sabotage on the Wet Deck of the Paint Shop at Halewood, used as a means of sustaining job controls when challenged.
12. This stress on economism itself reinforced by trade unions (cf. Lenin, 1977; Lane, 1974; Clements, 1977; Anderson, 1977), is encouraged by management as part of the conservative strategy of 'restrictionism'. Furthermore, competition between work groups for higher wages - again a consequence of trade union organisation - helps management attain their aim of sectionalisation.
13. All participants possess the ultimate capacity to withdraw their contributions by leaving, absenting themselves or

13. (cont'd)

striking, but in circumstances that are compatible with conservative coercive strategy (lay-off, dismissal etc.), such political actions may not be perceived as realistic possibilities.

14. For example, strikes led by shop stewards who belong to the Communist (or other radical left-wing) Party are outwardly condemned by the popular press because of the ideological and political inspiration of their leaders. Lay-offs, redundancies, plant closures etc. may invoke a sympathetic understanding in all quarters of the national press, but they will also be seen as rational and necessary (whether or not the involved managers are members of the Conservative Party).

15. This analysis complements the arguments about the instability of inconsistent theorising in various economic-historical conditions (see 8.6).

## CHAPTER TEN

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

With the end of Chapter Nine so too ends Part Three of this thesis in which I have attempted to establish theoretical points of reference for the interpretive study of organisational life as a political process. It is characteristic of a sensitising methodology that academic theorising is an ongoing activity so that it would be misleading to consider the present work to be exhaustive or complete in any sense other than having more-or-less fulfilled the promises outlined in Chapter One. As in any thesis, my arguments have raised many issues and problems which, because of their *relative* peripherality to the central aims, have been put aside only partly examined, or totally unexplored. These issues will, in general, need to remain in such states, although in the second section of the present chapter I shall at least identify explicitly three of the most pressing problems that are outstanding. Before attending to this unfinished business, I shall summarise the foregoing theoretical arguments by way of drawing out some of the major implications of the thesis for the sociological study of organisations, and, in so doing, I shall indicate some of the points at which the conceptual levers of a political approach to organisational life may prove helpful to that study.

#### 10.1 Summary and Conclusions

My concern has been to show that theorising power and politics, or any other topic, is more than a formal operation of defining those concepts in clear unambiguous terms. The ways in which power and politics are viewed by both academics and organisational participants depend upon a whole range of politics-related matters, from visions of order and conflict, to perceptions of social opportunity and constraint. In order to ascertain the

effective, usually implicit conceptions of power and politics in organisations, it was necessary to devote much energy probing beneath the formal concepts offered by theorists in this area of research.

These detailed critiques of the major contributors to the politics-related literature reveal that three main *types* of approach have been used, and that these types of approach exhibit thematic similarities to those perspectives or frameworks which have guided research in other political arenas. The unitary approach focuses upon the formal hierarchical aspects of the localised structural framework of organisations, and assumes - by resort to (implicit) postulates of consensus - that political action and organisational order are explicable with reference to such information. On the other hand, the pluralist type of approach concentrates on political behaviour and processes in their competitive social context, but fails to appreciate the structural factors circumscribing such social action. Finally, the critical type of approach comprehends the latter structural influences, but overemphasises their strength in relation to constraint and order.

Within the broad framework of assumption and argument adopted in the present work, none of these types of approach provides a satisfactory account of the organisation *qua* political arena : an account in which the organisation is constituted by the subjectively-meaningful behaviour of organisational participants; an account which would guarantee that the empirical possibilities of organisation are maintained rather than closed by arbitrary theoretical dictate. In Chapter Five I suggested that these inadequacies lay as much in the dominant methodology of theorising, with its stress on closely-defined formal conceptual structures, as in the content of the theorising itself. I also proposed that a sensitising methodology, in which concepts and propositions are understood as unavoidably revisable and corrigible, would be not only more appropriate to the interpretive-sociological task-in-hand, but also more compatible with the epistemological possibilities of theory.

Given these shortcomings in the literature, my specific aim has been to theorise organisational power and politics by giving due weight to the ways in which power and politics are theorised by organisational participants themselves. In this way, academic theorising could be ushered in a direction congruent with the postulate of voluntarism and its corollary, social contingency. In spite of their weaknesses, the existing academic theories and approaches raise a number of pertinent theoretical issues, and provide some useful conceptual themes, through the analytical juxtaposition of which it has been possible, in Part Three, to develop suggestive lines of penetration into the topic of organisational power and politics. In particular, the themes of order-conflict, of possibilities-impossibilities, and of the two faces of power have informed theoretical discussion.

The interpretive-sociological framework which has developed in response to the above assumptions, issues and themes is constructed around five major conceptions (see Figure 9.2, p.386) - the structural framework of organisational life, everyday organisational theorising, political action, social context and political process - although it has only been possible to examine in detail the first three. The *structural framework* of organisational power responds to the "second face" conception, being the historically grounded theory and practice of life in organisations; the "established" ways of organising work in society, which predispose social action in certain directions. *Everyday organisational theorising*, which for reasons already explained has constituted the focal point of my thesis, refers to the manner in which participants perceive, interpret and make strategic plans to act in the organisational arena. Everyday organisational theorising and the structural framework are variable and contingently related, but the former conception provides the important interpretive link between the objective social-organisational world and the participants' observable, subjectively-meaningful *political actions*.

However, these theorised political actions must not be equated with organisational politics, which process is the object

of sociological understanding. Political actions of various participants intermesh in the concrete *social context* of the organisation, and, in doing so, have both intended and unintended consequences for the realisation of political ends, and for the (re)planning of courses of action. Participants' theorised political acts are thus socially and structurally influenced, and the result of this complex, socially-mediated interaction of factors may be called the *political process* of organisational life. The "gap" between political action and political process, "filled" by the social context, remains to be explored more fully elsewhere, with the help of empirical research.

One of the major implications of conceiving organisational power and politics in the way advocated in this thesis, is that the process cannot be explained merely with reference to internal factors. The narrow views which have prevailed in the literature tend to neglect the rather obvious points that organisations exist with societal contexts and that organisational experiences are only with difficulty divorced from social life in general. I have emphasised the need to correct this tendency both in the conception of the structural framework, with its two levels - societal and organisational - of ideological and factual influence; and in the investigation of everyday organisational theorising, the sources of which can only be fully explored in the context of societal ideology and social class. These considerations of organisational life serve to make the conception of internal power and politics more complete and realistic, and result only from asking much broader sociological questions than is typical of research into formal organisation. By placing organisations back in their societal context, and by broaching issues of wider theoretical interest as organisational problems, I hope to have contributed in part towards the reintegration of the sociology of organisations within the general discipline.

In this thesis, my aim has been to theorise the organisation as a political phenomenon. However this should not be considered as necessarily an end-in-itself, because an adequate

sociological view of organisational politics has obvious applications in the unravelling of the social intricacies of a large number of organisational topics and issues which have hitherto been treated more or less mechanistically. Before considering some of the unfinished business of the present effort, I shall suggest a few of the more promising points of application in the sociology of organisations.

Organisational change constitutes one of the most obvious topics which benefit from an explicitly political view. It is no coincidence that a number of the political-conflict approaches examined in Chapter Three emerged from initial interests in the problem of change and/or resistance to change at management and worker levels. In the dominant organisational approaches change and development occur as more-or-less automatic responses to structural pressures, but a political/interpretive view would envisage internal structural adaptations and changes as being socially-mediated, sponsored and opposed, predisposed or not... and so on. Such a framework would incorporate the idea that top management enjoy "strategic choice" in organisational decisions, but would recommend that such choices be analysed as a political process.

The systematic application of an interpretive sociological analysis that concentrates on power relationships could also complement the normal structuralist, often unsociological approaches to horizontal and hierarchical organisational relations. While several sociologists have partially realised in interdepartmental studies the potential of this sort of approach (see Chapter Three), none has consistently applied it. On the other hand, analysis of hierarchical relationships has invariably been conducted without reference to political factors. Similarly, the problems of managerial succession and of the changing of organisational regimes are inexorably political in nature; remaining at the level of managerial behaviour, studies of committee processes have tended to be formalistic or social-psychological in orientation. Seen as political, such processes become analysable, with increased credibility, within my framework.

The question of organisational goals has received a great deal of attention in the social scientific literature, but with few exceptions the tendency has been to treat them either as parameters or as explanatory factors in analysis. By theorising the setting and executing of organisational goals as a strategically political process - i.e. by adopting an approach which focuses on the precarious, contingent, and emergent nature of objectives - the study of this topic could be sociologically enriched. Industrial relations may serve as a final example of an area of study that may benefit from a political view of organisational processes. Whether interested in the internal dynamics of trade unions, in the field of management-union relations, or in the specific problems of industrial democracy, an explicitly political orientation with an interpretive-sociological foundation could prove highly insightful.

It is because a great proportion of social life is now conducted in, or influenced by, organisations, and because many processes, activities and relationships within organisational arenas are inevitably politicised or politicisable, that the sort of framework which I have been advocating promises so much in terms of sociological explanation.

## 10.2 Unfinished Business : Three Outstanding Problems

As a concluding section to this final chapter, I wish to acknowledge a number of issues which, although they have been raised in passing, have been neglected in the foregoing analysis. Since it is impossible to deal with all such matters, I have selected three which I, as the architect of this thesis, consider would benefit from more extended exploration. The following brief comments attempt to view the issues of everyday and academic theorising, of the intended and unintended consequences of social action, and of operationalising the proposed framework, in the context of the ideas already outlined - such sketches in no way constitute the extended exploration that is called for.

### 10.2.1 Academic and Everyday Theorising

Without entering into a rather lengthy philosophical debate about the superiority or relativity of scientific and lay thought concerning "truth" and "knowledge", there is little doubt that academic and everyday theorising about organisational life exhibit substantial similarities regarding their content and variety of form. In Chapter Five I wrote of 'open' and 'closed' academic theories, while a similar distinction underlay much of the discussion of everyday theorising in Chapter Eight and Nine. More specifically, however, it could be reasonably argued that the three types of academic approach abstracted from the literature in Part One - viz. unitary, pluralist and critical - bear a certain, though not exact, resemblance to the modes of everyday organisational theorising explored in Part Three - respectively normative, pragmatic and oppositional.

Just as the unitary type of approach takes as its primary problem the question of organisational order, which is answered unconvincingly with reference to an assumed state of normative consensus over the formal structure, so the normative mode of theorising is grounded in the social or moral legitimacy of the organisational order. The balance conception of order that underlies the superficial face of conflict in the pluralist approach, envisages organisational life as a competition between more-or-less equal parties which results in the adjustment of peripheral aspects of the basically accepted structural facts; whereas in the pragmatic mode of theorising, participants' attention is restricted to dealing with localised issues as they arise in a structural framework which is generally accepted as unalterable. In many ways, as I have shown in 6.3 and 6.4, the critical type of approach complements the pluralist one, as does the oppositional mode with the pragmatic (see 8.6). The former type of academic theorising expresses a critical understanding of the grounds of organisational order, yet assumes an unthoughtful acceptance of that order; an uncritical acceptance of the general logic and premises of organisational life, coupled with a localised conflict awareness of

peripheral ("insignificant") issues, characterises social actors who employ the oppositional mode of theorising.

While I would not like to overstretch the case, these similarities in the form and content of academic and everyday theorising raise a number of questions about the relationship of these organisational vocabularies. To a degree, of course, such relationships should be expected because both sociologists and lay participants are "interested" parties in the same broad socio-cultural context of organisations, but the implications of borrowings and loans from one sphere to the other need thorough examination. The interpenetration of academic and everyday theorising has consequences for methodology and for the sociology of knowledge, but the *extent* of interpenetration that exists in the organisational field provides some indication of the power of dominant ideas as they become transposed into both professional and lay thinking.

It has been a recurrent topic of interest in the methodology of the social sciences that academic sociology has borrowed, indeed cannot avoid borrowing, concepts and propositions from everyday life and thereby, to some unspecifiable degree, includes the preconceptions and ideas of the groups under scrutiny. In the field of organisations, these preconceptions and ideas have largely belonged to management, in whose territory and with whose permission research is undertaken. The problems incurred from borrowing are particularly intense for interpretive sociology which by definition builds its understanding of the social world upon the various views of social actors.

However the effects of commonsense views upon social scientific knowledge have been subject to intense discussion, so that it is possibly of more interest, given the relative paucity of debate, to consider the inverse relationship. (Giddens, 1976, p.115). In meeting non-sociologists, or reading the newspapers, or watching the television, it is impossible not to notice that the concepts and ideas of sociology filter through social and

linguistic barriers to enter into the vocabulary and thinking of actors in everyday life. Apart from the methodological problems of such infiltration of commonsense theorising which may affect the (natural) course of events under sociological investigation, the everyday acquisition of academic language is of ideological and political relevance. As already suggested, academic theories of organisational life have tended to be distilled, at least in part, from the dominant vocabulary in that sphere, so that managerial theorising, through its association with social science, acquires a greater respectability and neutrality. Moreover, managerial wisdom re-enters organisational life clothed in scientific language, which not only reinforces the political actions and positions of higher participants, but also percolates through the levels of the organisation lending scientific credibility to what are partial views. The existence at all levels of organisational life of potted versions of the academic theories of alienation, of resistance to change, of participation, of motivation, of job enrichment and involvement etc. illustrates the political implications of the dialectical relationship between academic and everyday theorising.

#### 10.2.2 The Intended and Unintended Consequences of Social Action

As explained earlier, my thesis has stopped short of examining the relationship between strategic political action and the process of organisational politics which is collectively and historically constituted by such action. This omission refers to what I have called the "social context" of organisational politics, which, being socially created by the actions of participants in the concrete situation, directly relates to the observable first face of power.

As I have suggested in Chapter Nine, the theoretical gap between political action and political process may be investigated in terms of the intended and unintended consequences of political courses of action. Employing the type of sensitising

framework proposed in Part Three, it is possible to arrive at an interpretive understanding of the courses of political action theorised and projected by organisational participants. However it is a further problem to comprehend the outcome of the complex relationships between historically and currently intersecting courses of political action. Such actions will enjoy varying degrees of success and failure according to structural predispositions and the situational responses of other participants, and, since few participants are likely to experience absolute success (i.e. complete realisation of political intentions), it is important to consider the social repercussions of relative success and failure.

Merton's (1968, p.73ff.) classic analysis of the manifest and latent functions of social patterns rightfully made a lasting impression upon sociologists working within the then dominant functionalist and structural-functionalist perspective, but no comparable theoretical clarification has been forthcoming on the intended and unintended consequences of social action. This distinction is particularly relevant to the study of politics, whose main feature is the strategic pursuit of intentions.

The political acts of a given organisational participant may meet with (relative) failure for structural and social reasons although the two are often related in that structural predispositions may become the focus of political leverage. Intentional acts may be frustrated by the (more powerful) intentionality of other political actors, who defensively or positively counter the first actor's moves (which, possibly, were structurally unrealistic in the first place). A more complicated situation arises when intentions suffer because of the unanticipated consequences of an actor's own actions and/or those of other actors, these (accumulated) consequences effectively increasing the social impossibilities inhering in the social context. Alternatively, and equally feasibly, the intended actions of others (or indirectly of structural biases) or the unintended consequences described, may enhance the social possibilities of realising an actor's goals. In turn, of course, our given actor's behaviour contributes to the social possibilities and impossibilities of other participants.

In this view, the intended and unanticipated consequences of political actions in the social context will influence the outcome of those actions as they interrelate to create the observable political process. Indeed, the feedback derived from the experience of other actors' intentions and the resulting consequences may well lead participants to reassess their possibilities of success, and revise their strategies in accordance with their new information. Although a great deal of theoretical work is required in order to explore the ramifications of the distinction between intended and unintended consequences for interpretive sociology, it is undoubtedly at least as urgent that these ideas, and the others developed in Part Three, become subject to empirical research.

### 10.2.3 Problems of Empirical Research

My aim throughout this thesis has been to conduct a *theoretical* investigation into the interpretive nature of organisational power and politics, but *a priori* theorising, however well-supported or illustrated by secondary data, is only the initial, albeit indispensable, step in sociological research. The detailed problems of putting the proposed interpretive sociological framework "into operation" must remain unfinished business in the present context, but to neglect the matter altogether would be to abrogate my responsibility to the type of sociological methodology which I espoused in Chapter Five. The close relationship between theory and empirical evidence inherent in a sensitising methodology needs to be acknowledged in a few general comments.

The approach outlined in Part Three requires access to information about three crucial conceptions : first, about the structural framework of power in the organisation(s) being studied; second, about the theories used by organisational participants; third, about the social context of the political process.

The most accessible information about the structural framework derives from an examination of the formal and customary ways of

organising human beings in the arena in question. The legal system as it relates to the organisation under study provides good indicators of both the factual and the ideological aspects of the societal-institutional level of the structural framework, although these formal images need to be complemented by knowledge of the customary practices and cultural values which influence the nature of power and politics in the given organisation. It would be shortsighted, for example, to examine power and politics in mental institutions or prisons without attending to the commonsense stock of knowledge (e.g. "public opinion") and background understandings prevailing in society. At the level of organisational rationality, knowledge of the rules, procedures, controls etc., as outlined in Chapter Seven, provides fundamental insights into the "factual" aspects of organisational life, and, by inference, into its ideological aspects. While information about the "dominant theory" of how organisations (should) work is available directly and indirectly, *in the end* the task of constructing an overall image of the structural framework as a set of ideological and factual givens, is an interpretive problem for the sociologist.

Whereas the latter interpretive task may be founded upon more-or-less tangible factors - laws, rules, wage-systems etc. - which are understood as embodying an overall rationality, logic or ideology, the need to comprehend the everyday theorising of organisational participants poses more difficult, and more contentious problems for empirical research. The "double hermeneutic" (Giddens, 1976, p.79) of interpretive sociology, involving the academic theorising of lay theorising, involves complex issues both of research philosophy and of concrete research procedure which can only be hinted at in these closing paragraphs. In order to acquire an interpretive understanding of social-organisational life, the researcher needs to discover the intentions and interpretive schemes of social actors, their commitments, their perceptions and their projected views. The methodological complexities and inherent difficulties of such an approach must be confronted, for the sake of adequate sociological knowledge.

How is it possible to "know" the intentions and motives of social actors, and the broader interpretive schemes through which their courses of action acquire a rationality? As Schutz (1972, p.229) argues, mere observation cannot provide the researcher with a satisfactory grasp of the subjective meaningfulness of social action - what is needed is an "immersion" (Giddens, 1976, p.161) in the social-organisational life of participants. Thorough familiarity with and experience of living in a particular political regime at various levels, it becomes more feasible for the researcher to characterise modes of social existence as theoretically mediated by participants. Participation in the shared organisational lives of participants implies a number of methodological issues (e.g. the relationships between expressed language, intention and meaning; the 'truthfulness' of informants) and has its attendant methodological dangers (notably, subjective bias) - all matters which have been exhaustively debated in various wings of the sociological discipline - but it remains the most suitable means of gathering the kind of information needed. It has the additional advantage of permitting fairly unobtrusive simultaneous use of other methods of data collection e.g. unstructured interviews, access to documents.

The social context of the process of politics requires no special methods beyond those described above. Participant observation, together with the informed interpretive powers of sociological inference, allows the researcher to obtain information about intended courses of political action and the actual course of events. However, the distinction between the intended and unintended consequences of social action does raise a complicated question upon a satisfactory answer to which the theoretical and methodological efficacy of interpretive sociology depends - viz. to what extent can one trust the images of organisational life which participants describe, directly or indirectly, to researchers? Through malevolence, ignorance, misunderstanding, inarticulateness etc., participants may give false or misleading information about their own intentions, or about their perceived intentions of others.

One might suspect that this matter is of special importance to the study of power and politics, since in political life, even if an actor's 'real' intentions are known to himself, it is often not the "done thing" to disclose them publicly. As Burns (1961, p.260) has argued, the language of politics in many organisations is not publicly available to be directly observed, because the (self) attribution of "political motive" only occurs behind closed doors or on similarly private occasions. In public, therefore, actions are taken for the "common good", for the "organisation", for the "work force", for the "customers" etc. - such is the accepted "vocabulary of motive" (Mills, 1940) in organisational life even if everyone "secretly" knows differently.

The question of the "truthfulness" of research informants thus reveals further aspects of the nature of organisational power and politics which are too important to neglect but too detailed to examine herein. In organisational life, as elsewhere, the "real motives" of political action, as avowed or imputed by participants themselves, become muddled with rationalisations which lay claim to, or dispute, social legitimacy on grounds acceptable within the organisation as a specific arena of situated actions; because the attribution of motive and intention is so much part of the culture and linguistic tradition of the particular arena, this muddle can often not be clarified by the actors themselves. Managers will not embark upon a course of action *aimed at* fragmenting work shop organisation *without* having good "organisationally rational" reasons e.g. job enrichment; socialist stewards will not endeavour to create a collective militant action *without* having good "rational" trade union reasons e.g. an intransigent management on a wage-issue.

Rationalisation of intentions is thus a *strategic* aspect of the everyday organisational theorising of power and politics, and needs to be understood as an integral part of the socially-mediated political process. The tasks of comprehending rationalisation and of inferring "real" intention are truly interpretive, and are necessary to the empirical study of organisational power and politics :

"... the imputation and avowal of motives by actors are social phenomena to be explained. The differing reasons men give for their actions are not themselves without reasons." (Mills, 1940, p.439).

Only from an immersed position within the organisation, *in spite of* the methodological problems this creates, can the sociologist enquire into questions such as the ones posed during the last four chapters.

These problems, with their various theoretical and methodological implications, require further attention elsewhere, and, no doubt, there are other matters which the reader, from his or her own viewpoint, can identify as worthy candidates for more extensive treatment. However, it is now necessary to draw my arguments to an end. Two general propositions permeate this thesis : first, that an adequate theory of organisational life (including power and politics) must be constructed upon interpretive sociological foundations whose building blocks are the postulates of voluntarism and of social contingency; second, that academic theorising within the organisational subfield must take stock of, and contribute to, the major issues and debates which engage sociologists throughout the discipline. The current state of organisational sociology is broadly, but demonstrably, resistant to both propositions, so that in focusing specifically upon the everyday theorising activities of social actors I have attempted to substantiate their relevance and wisdom in the context of one particular topic - that of power and politics in organisational arenas.

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