Interest Groups and Public Policy: The Insider/Outsider Model Revisited*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the place of groups in the consultative process in British policymaking. It stresses the importance of consultation even under the Thatcher government and distinguishes between consultation, bargaining and negotiation. The paper identifies the important divide between the relatively few groups with privileged status and the greater number of groups who find themselves consigned to less influential positions. The discussion revisits the insider/outsider typology often used to differentiate interest group strategies and status in policy development. It suggests that the insider group term is associated with a particular style of policy making, and offers amendments to the existing use of the terms to avoid the difficulties which occur from the conflation of group strategy and group status.

The 'insider group'/'outsider group' labels enjoy wide currency in the public policy literature in spite of underdeveloped attempts to invest them with a theoretical spine. The utility of the terms rests on the images of the group world they project. Their appeal rests on their flexibility and looseness, which allows use interchangeably (and sometimes simultaneously) to describe the means of influence of groups, and their status as actors in the political system. This looseness in definition, however, can also give rise to contradictions and confusion, and detracts from the fact that the terms have more to offer than a rudimentary dichotomy of the group world. Our intention is to explore the case for refinement, accordingly our discussion is grounded in the existing literature rather than detailed new evidence.

One of the first to identify the differentiated nature of access in the policy-making process was E. E. Schattschneider. He used the terms insiders and outsiders to distinguish between insider groups enjoying some sort of privileged access to (and advanced intelligence on the thinking of) decision-makers, and outsiders who did not:

> . . . the contrast is between 'insiders' who knew very much and 'outsiders' who knew very little. And this is what might have been expected, for the groups which knew their way about knew also where to go for information on their own initiative and knew how to get it. Others, oblivious to what was happening, did nothing at all or became excited only after it was too late (Schattschneider, 1935, p. 166).

Satisfying though it is to track down this early use of the term, we should not fall into the trap of assuming that Schattschneider anticipated the whole of the subsequent literature. His account is anecdotal, and perhaps he only intended that smarter political operators do better in policy making.

Several typologies of groups and/or their activities (usually in two box form) have been introduced. In his case study of policy-making in the London Boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea, Dearlove (1973, p. 160) used the terms 'helpful' and 'unhelpful' to distinguish between those (helpful) groups which enjoyed 'effective access' and influence and those (unhelpful) groups that did not. In his work on Birmingham, Newton (1976, p. 47) found similar processes at work. He used the labels 'established' and 'non-established' to distinguish between insider/ outsider type participants. The most influential British contribution has been by Wyn Grant (1978). He utilised the Insider/Outsider labels and developed related propositions. He has argued:

> The basic distinction in this paper between insider groups and outsider groups, is a distinction based on interest group *strategies*, by which is meant the combination of modes of action used by an interest group to attain its goals. It must be emphasised that the acquisition of insider or outsider *status* by a group involves *both* a decision by government and a decision by the group concerned. The basic aim of such insider groups is to establish a consultative relationship whereby their views on particular legislative proposals will be sought prior to the crystallisation of the Government's position (Grant, 1978, p. 2).

Grant basically distinguishes between those insider groups who are ascribed legitimate status by government and are accordingly involved in meaningful consultation on a regular basis and those outsider groups who are unable to achieve such a favourable status position, and do not become engaged in consultation processes.

Although Grant maintained that 'there is a sense in which the notion of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' is peculiar to British culture', we, like many

others who have followed Grant, consider the approach need not be confined to British cases. These terms have been reinvented regularly in the United States. For example, Walker's work on America distingu- ishes groups which pursue an 'inside' strategy:

... based primarily upon close consultation with political and administrative leaders, relying mainly upon their financial resources, substantive expertise, and concentration within certain congressional committees as a basis for influ- ence. Other groups become dedicated mainly to 'outside' strategies based upon appeals to the public through the mass media and efforts at the broad-scale mobilization of citizens at 'grass roots' (Walker, 1991, p. 9).

Our argument about the predominance of insider groups rests on acceptance of the importance of consultative arrangements in policy development. In our view there is a very important consequence for the classification of interest groups that stems from what is an inaccurate description of the policy process that assumes that government routinely and selectively denies access to groups. This suggests that the important divide is between a limited number of groups with inside status and a large and important category of outside groups.

1. The Insider Proposition

The image of an insider group has to be related to the practice of policy being made in consultation between sections of the bureaucracy and clientelistic interests. Repeatedly the idea has emerged in the literature that certain groups had a privileged position in the policy making pro- cess. The 'insider' proposition has to be related to the consultative pro- cess of policy making: insider groups are 'insider' in terms of *consultation*. The theme of insider activity has to be related to this particular policy making context.

Policy making influence is not equal for all participants. While a wide and diverse set of policy participants are involved in consultation, only a restricted number have significant influence. Thus consultation has as much to do with exclusion and bias, as it has with inclusion and balance. However, exclusion should not be exaggerated. On many occa- sions policy making civil servants are likely to be scanning the horizon for groups who may be able to aid them in policy formulation. It is not always the case that groups are clamouring to be heard, and desperately attempting to force concessions from a reluctant bureaucracy. The policy relevant group can simplify the policy making task. Groups may be actively pursued because they are the possessors of 'indispensable information' which decision-makers seek. As Keefe and Ogul (1964) say:

No lawmaker brings to his job the technical knowledge requisite to an intelligent evaluation of all legislation; neither is the legislature as a whole geared to supply the necessary quantity of expert help. Accordingly, legislators turn to pressure groups for pertinent opinions, data and analysis — and the information they provide may not be available anywhere else (Keefe and Ogul, 1964, pp. 366–367).

1.1 Why Insiders?

A variety of reasons can be advanced to explain why there is a strong tendency for civil servants to seek to involve groups in policy making. These include:

. . . segmentation and conflict within the bureaucracy and the role of articulation of the interest of external clients;

. . . the devolution of policy making from politicians to civil servants — with the expectation that the civil servants can resolve the issue without political controversy; and

. . . this in turn leads to a system based on the exchange of information, trust and mutual support.

We largely concur with Browne (1991b, p. 500) that the relationship between groups and policy makers is 'based on market and exchange principles'. He maintains that organized interests develop issue identities — indeed are compelled to do so: '. . . because their representatives must have something recognizable to market within some one or more relevant networks of decision making'. Consequently, interest groups supply the distinct commodity which will 'meet a policymaker's specific demand':

An organized interest, in effect, gains a recognizable identity by defining a highly specific issue niche for itself and fixing its specified political assets (i.e., recognition and other resources) within that niche. (Browne, 1991b, p. 500).

Truman identified a group's ability to supply policymakers with information as 'one important factor among the informal determinants of access'. He maintained that such information or knowledge can be divided into two main types — technical and political:

. . . technical knowledge that defines the content of the policy issue; and political knowledge of the relative strength of competing claims and the consequences of alternative decisions on a policy issue . . . where official sources of information are deficient, command of technical knowledge may provide access for groups that can supply the deficiency (Truman, 1951, p. 334).

From Truman's discussion of the resource base of groups we see that technical or political knowledge are to some extent goods which can

compensate a group for a lack of other resources (e.g. economic or implementation power). Thus, groups who lack economic power may find that the development of (some) technical expertise, or political sophistication, may give them credibility with policymakers. For example, a list of consultees on Agricultural and the Environment we obtained in 1992 illustrated that over 150 groups who were routinely consulted, included: *56 environmental and consumer groups* (Council for Protection of Rural England, Countryside Commission, Friends of the Earth, Ramblers Association, RSPB *etc.*); 47 *agricultural groups* (National Farmers Union, Country Landowners Association, Scottish Landowners Association *etc.*); 14 *industrial organizations* (British Agrochemicals Association, Chemical Industries Association *etc.*); 15 research institutes and consultants (Land Drainage Contractors Association, The Pesticides Trust, *etc.*); 16 *water related organizations* (British Effluent and Water Association, British Waterways Board, National Rivers Authority, Water Companies Association, Water Services Association *etc.*); and 6 *local government and statutory bodies* (Association of County Councils, National Association of Local Councils, Association of District Councils *etc.*). The variety of bodies consulted illustrates that different types of resource base can be effective in securing access to consultation lists. We do not however, equate access to consultation lists with influence. Nor do we pretend that economic power is other than vital, it cannot always be compensated by other resources.

Hansen (1991), discussing access to the US legislature argues that interest groups gain access when they convince legislators that they can aid their re-election process. Legislators main concern, according to Hansen (1991, pp. 11–12), is 'electoral uncertainty'. Thus, interest groups gain access:

... when they provide information at lower cost than their competitors, or when they promote the electoral aims of their clients better than their competitors ... when legislators judge that interest groups enjoy competitive advantage over rival informants, and when they expect the conditions that maintain competitive advantage to recur, they build close consultative relationships with political advocacy groups (Hansen, 1991, pp. 14–215).

As these sources suggest, government/policymakers should not be presented or imagined as some kind of citadel resisting invaders. Instead the development of policy forces civil servants to look for external views. Policy making is not a case of groups begging government to let them in, but of government trying to make use of what exists in the group society. Seidman (1975) argues that bureaucracies deliberately set out to cultivate an interest group clientele, and Finer (1966, p. 24) maintained that the 'whole framework of public administration' would be

'seriously dislocated' if pressure groups did not actively participate in the formulation of policy. There is also undoubtedly a cultural/constitutional convention that holds that policy making is more legitimate when affected interests are involved, and ideally satisfied. Civil servants also look to interest groups to help deliver political support. Thus consultation is a functional necessity in the process of developing effective policies.

It is worth noting that negotiations tend to be carried out in secret, which Eckstein (1960, p. 158) maintains is not due to any 'anti-democratic collusion', but merely because few people have an interest or knowledge of many of the specific technical issues being considered. These types of consultations also tend to be on issues which lack high political saliency, that is, they have been 'depoliticised' into a series of technical issues to be resolved by 'professional policymakers'. These consultations are not always restricted to minor and technical matters: most policy will eventually be resolved in similarly restricted consultations. If consultation is unimportant (or its importance exaggerated in our hands) it is remarkable that professional groups persist in contributing to the process and that commercial companies fund trade associations to do so.

1.2 State Discretion?

It is argued by some that the power of the insider group does not depend on its political resources but on the power of recognition by the state: the state accepts as insiders only those groups with which it is predisposed to agree. Smith argues that:

... the power of a pressure group is not dependent on its resources but on whether it is allowed into the community and what issues it is likely to raise ... The political power of pressure groups ... depends more on the government's perceptions of it than any objective power it might have (Smith, 1990, p. 7 and p. 210).

Similarly, Christiansen and Dowding maintain that Amnesty International's insider status at the Foreign Office 'is granted':

... because it provides the government with good information which can be used as a lever in international negotiations. From this viewpoint, Amnesty's preferences just happen to coincide with the government's or, adopting a still more Machiavellian outlook, can be exploited by state actors (Christiansen and Dowding, 1994, pp. 15–16).

In our view those who argue for this sort of state autonomy (weak or strong) need to reinforce the strength of their arguments – by making explicit what is *the nature of the state*, and how in practice it affects policy

making. Our account in this paper is based on the assumption that there is a fragmentation within 'the state' and that parts of the bureaucracy define their goals in terms of satisfying group clienteles. In this world, groups which have limited and non-controversial aims can expect to advance them by 'insider' means.

In contrast to Smith, Christansen and Dowding and others, we would wish to adopt a limited conception of government in our account of the policy process. Government cannot be characterised as the central all-commanding actor who unilaterally – irrespective of the resources which groups possess – decides who gains access to decision making arenas and who doesn't. Such a perspective denies the validity of what we believe (supported by numerous empirical case studies) to be the currency for exchange-based behaviour within closed policy making arenas – *i.e.* resources. Rose (1985) identifies three main resource factors. First, *the ability to organise* – how easily can shared attitudes be converted into an organization able to articulate group demands. Thus 'producer interests are more readily organized than consumer interests'. Secondly, *organizational cohesion* – the degree of the members' commitment to the organization's goals. A high commitment enables the group's leadership to speak confidently on behalf of their members. Thirdly, *strategic location* – the control of 'resources indispensable in society' – the greater the control the greater the potential leverage. We would add several other resources to this list including: economic significance; size (membership); knowledge (technical expertise or political sophistication); implementation power. In our view government cannot afford to ignore the *resource-rich* group. Moreover given the clientelistic tendencies in the fragmented state, the relevant departments have expectations thrust upon them that greatly limit their discretion.

1.3 Consultation: A Growing Phenomena

In our view the practice of consultation has been *growing* in importance over the last decade. A note (October, 1993) from a senior civil servant at the DTI in relation to claims that consultation was reduced under the Thatcher administration stated that:

This was most certainly not my experience, either at official level or at the level of the former Prime Minister herself who was one of the most formidably well informed Ministers I have ever known, taking her information from wide range of consultative sources . . . Of course we consult. I do not think the Government would survive long if we did not. In practical terms, the problem is how to consult effectively with the limited resources and time at one's disposal.

The CBI's own view, published in 1992, did not suggest a downgrading of their role:

CBI representations have frequently emphasised the fundamental importance of consultation. In theory at least, this is recognised by both the executive and the legislature – not just as part of the democratic process, but in order to arrive at the most effective solutions. Experience in the tax field suggests that consultation has *become more widespread*, though by no means universal (Hansard Society, 1993, p. 124) (Emphasis added).

The Institute of Directors confirmed the importance of extra-parliamentary consultation and negotiation:

The legislative process (is) much wider than parliament. It is a long drawn process involving interactions at many levels and . . . today the Westminster Parliament (Ministers apart) is a residual last stage focus of pressure (Hansard Society, 1993, p. 257).

The Hansard Society study of this issue noted that there had been a dramatic rise in the number of consultative documents published in recent years (Table 1).

TABLE 1: *Nunber of Consultative Documents From Goverment*

Year	No.	Year	No.	Year	No.
1976	11	1981	76	1986	191
1977	27	1982	76	1987	208
1978	48	1983	112	1988	288
1979	63	1984	146	1989	276
1980	85	1985	140	1990	267

(Hansard Society, 1993, Appendix 8)

It is the reinforcement of consultation practices that adds to the significance of the insider phenomenon. This leads us to emphasise distinctions *within the broad insider category* rather than the insider/outsider divide.

2. Access and Bias

The underlying reason why students of politics have been so interested in the insider/outsider distinction is undoubtedly because it appears to reflect the pattern of power. Schattschneider (1935, p. 166) posed the two central questions which are still valid:

How were some groups able to break into the inner circle while others found it impossible to approach the centre of power and influence? By what means did a few groups gain access to vital and confidential news which the great majority were unable to learn?

As he famously argued later:

The flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent . . . Pressure politics is a selective process ill designed to

serve diffuse interests. The system is skewed, loaded, and unbalanced in favour of a fraction of a minority (Schattschneider, 1960, pp. 35–36).

Truman (1951, p. 264) in *The Governmental Process* echoed these concerns. He realised that if groups were to gain any measure of 'success' or 'effectiveness' – however these elusive concepts are measured – then they required access to 'one or more key points of decision in government'. Truman argued that access was the 'facilitating intermediate objective of political interest groups':

The development and improvement of such access is a common denominator of the tactics of all of them, frequently leading to efforts to exclude competing groups from equivalent access or to set up new decision points, access to which can be monopolized by a particular group. Towards whatever institution of government we observe interest groups operating, the common feature of all of their efforts is the attempt to achieve effective access to points of decision (Truman, 1951, p. 264).

In fact, discussions on access have quickly gone on to make the important distinction between access and influence. With regard to the quality of access Truman recognised an inherent bias in policy making structures:

Access is not a homogeneous commodity. In some forms it provides little more than a chance to be heard; in others it practically assures favourable action. Some groups achieve highly effective access almost automatically, whereas it is denied to others in spite of their most vigorous efforts (Truman, 1951, p. 321).

Keefe and Ogul (1964, p. 357) reinforce Truman's point, '. . . there is a difference between the 'door-opening power' of groups and the 'decision-making power'. Plainly, not all groups share equally in access or in influence'. Since these issues of access and bias have been to the fore within the so called pluralist literature, many criticisms have been effectively pre-empted. The critics are stating little which is not made explicit in the work of Truman (1951), Keefe and Ogul (1964) and others.

   Many groups are granted *access* to decision makers, (as the scale of the number of groups on departmental consultation lists testifies) but few have a significant *influence* over substantive policy outcomes. Perhaps the substance of the distinction between access and influence is more clearly perceived if one uses the terms consultation and negotiation. Access merely leads to consultation, while privileged access leads to bargaining and negotiation. The process of consultation involving hundreds of groups is qualitatively different from that which involves a handful of groups in close regularised consultative relationship with decision makers. Most writers tend to contrast the successful insider

group (such as the National Farmers' Union) that has daily dealings
with their sponsor Ministry (or to be more precise, sponsor Divisions),
with the politically marginalised or ideologically unacceptable group
(such as Hunt Saboteurs) which has no place in the consultative process.
We would also emphasise (and discuss below) the important distinctions
within the very broad category of 'insider groups'.

A perspective based on the quality of access throws up the question
about 'insiderness' as opposed to the division between inside and out-
side. Is the insider population restricted to policy community type parti-
cipants who have significant relevant political resources and are unlikely
to be ignored in policy making? Or does it include any group that
restricts its political efforts to what Dunleavy (1991) terms 'low cost
actions' (responding to routine consultations, petitions, lobbying elected
representatives), as opposed to 'high cost actions' (non co-operation
with government, boycotts or non-compliance, strikes/industrial action,
civil disobedience)?

From our point of view the difference of groups is to be found within
those engaged mainly in 'low cost actions'. There are many groups on
many issues whose impact does not go beyond the cosmetic. However,
they do not then adopt any of the 'high cost' strategies. For example in
Jordan's (1992) study of the development of the Engineering Council –
on the matter which was believed by some to be a key issue, industrial
regeneration – he found that at different stages hundreds of organiza-
tions submitted their views. Most of them, including, the Committee of
Vice Chancellors and Principals, and even the CBI had very little
impact, but they did not then adopt more public tactics. They were
relatively powerless insider groups.

There was however, a (changing) core of bodies like the Institution
of Electrical Engineers (IEE), the Institution of Mechanical Engineers,
the Engineering Employers Federation, the Engineering Fellowship that
had qualitatively different access and influence. The literature does not
give much guidance as to whether the former are 'insiders' or not. We
suggest that they be included in the category. One reason for accepting
a group that contents itself with low cost political activities as 'insider' –
whether or not it has much clout – is that the alternative notion of
confining the label to those with power means the label could only be
applied after empirical study as to how seriously the group is treated in
the consultations. We would like to treat a body such as the IEE as
influential even though it was not successful in securing the statute
based change that it initially sought. By influential we do not mean
successful but that theirs was a significant voice in the policy debate.

Interviews with civil servants in various Divisions of MAFF in 1992,
reinforced our belief that the threshold for access is low and that the

real area for study should be an assessment of influence (rather than access). We found that access to consultations lists had as much to do with self-selection as it had with bureaucratic discretion. Civil servants maintained that those groups involved in detailed discussions with departments were those who 'took the trouble' to respond in detail to proposals. They claimed that the demonstration of a 'serious interest' is the prerequisite for involvement in the consultative process. They were perfectly well aware that some groups (e.g. Parents for Safe Food) were likely to be highly critical of the status quo but realised that to have excluded their 'input' would not have diminished their political impact.

Civil servants undoubtedly see some groups as more important than others: on lists that might extend to 1,000 organizations it would be unlikely that they could manage to absorb the comments of more than 20 or so participants. When asked, civil servants had no difficulty in identifying who counted – although this varied according to the topic under discussion. Their 'big player' world view perceived only certain inputs as 'indispensable'. Much of the response to this kind of exercise is undoubtedly disregarded. If it goes against a departmental policy that has been reasonably well articulated, there is a strong chance that the contribution could be marginalised as being 'predictable self-interest'.

This is not to accept that the processes are necessarily sham – though some consultation exercises (particularly on high profile political issues) are no doubt cosmetic. Civil servants pay disproportionate attention to 'their' clients interests. Thus the working expectation in the 'departmental pluralist' perspective (Wilson, 1977, p. 47) is that dissenting voices might find access through another Department that better represents their views. Wilson notes that the Ministry of Agriculture did not have unrestricted autonomy on agricultural matters: 'The Treasury and Board of Trade were formidable adversaries for the farming interest, and they could count on further support from more marginally involved Ministries' (Wilson, 1977, p. 47).

3. Reformulating the Insider-Outsider Typology: Separating Strategy from Status

Grant (1989) identified three sub-divisions within each of his two main categories. First, within the insider category there are: 'Prisoner groups' who find it difficult to 'break away from an insider relationship' because they may be dependent on 'government assistance' or because they are within the public sector. Secondly, 'Low Profile' insiders who place great stress on 'behind the scenes' interactions with government and are unlikely to utilise the mass media as a strategy. Thirdly, there are

'High Profile' insiders who aim to persuade government through appeals to public opinion (Grant, 1989, p. 16).

The first group within his outsider category are 'Potential Insiders' who desire insider status but have, as yet, been unsuccessful in their quest. Insider status may be secured as a result of a successful high profile campaign, but Grant (1989, pp. 17–18) argues success is more likely to be achieved through the pursuit of 'a more responsible and conventional strategy of action'. Secondly there are 'Outsiders by Necessity' who may wish to become insiders but lack the required (sophisticated) understanding of the political system to attain such status. These groups may become insiders if they develop the necessary political skills.

Essentially the difference between the 'potential insiders' and 'outsiders by necessity' is that the former have developed the necessary political skills required for insider status, whereas the latter have yet to develop such skills. Given the exchange-based nature of the bureaucracy/group relationship we suspect that most groups within the 'potential insider' category have failed to achieve insider status because they lack the resources necessary to force their way into the inside track. The final category are 'Ideological Outsiders' who are likely to oppose the existing political order. Their 'irresponsible' and 'illegitimate' views lead to their exclusion.

May and Nugent (1982) modify Grant's (strategy) scheme by introducing a third concept – thresholders. Thresholders vacillate between 'pursuing and not pursuing a symbiotic relationship with decision-makers'. Thresholders can be 'characterised by strategic ambiguity and oscillation between insider and outsider strategies' (May and Nugent, 1982, p. 7). Both May and Nugent and Walker (1991) (in the UK and the US respectively) identified trade unions as thresholder type organizations. Walker (1991, p. 11) claims that trade unions are '. . . likely . . . to pursue a mixture of 'outside' and 'inside' strategies'.

While Grant (1978, and 1989) recognised the complexity of the task of analysing the interrelated facets of *strategy* and *status* in the insider/ outsider area, he nevertheless uses the one set of terms, 'insider' and 'outsider', to describe these different, albeit related, aspects. For example, if we look at the sub-divisions within his insider category we can see that 'Prisoner Group' appears to relate to a status position, while 'Low Profile' and 'High Profile' insiders seems to be associated more to the strategies a group pursues. We would (now) prefer to consciously separate what Grant has joined together. Strategy is a matter *selected by* the group. The status position is conditional upon government granted legitimacy: it is *ascribed* by policymakers to the group. We

believe that such legitimacy is more contingent upon the resources of the group, than (as the literature appears to imply) the strategies a group pursues. The primary factor for the Government in the allocation of insider status is the possession of a (valuable) resource, for example: economic power, knowledge (normally technical expertise), representative base, implementation power, compliance power etc. In determining status, strategies are secondary (while nevertheless significant) to questions of resources.

Grant (1989, p. 21) pre-empts this point about dividing the dimensions to a degree by maintaining that, '... in practice, strategy and status are very closely interlinked, and it may be undesirable to separate them. Pursuing an insider strategy is a precondition of winning insider status'. However, even if pursuing an insider strategy is a precondition to attaining the status, there can be cases where the strategy is not enough.

Grant also argues that the existence of the insider/outsider strategy distinction highlights the way in which the state sets the rules of the game for pressure group activity: 'Access and consultation flow from the adoption of a pattern of behaviour which is acceptable to government, particularly civil servants. This creates incentives for groups to act in a particular way: pressure groups are thus tamed and domesticated with only the ideological rejectionists remaining outside the system' (Grant, 1989, p. 21). This is to emphasise the insufficiency of strategy as a means to insider status: the bureaucracy has the effective power of recognition. It is likely to grant status to groups which share the bias, instincts, priorities and culture of the department, but these are matters that the groups can help determine.

The quest for insider status is enhanced by the utilisation of an insider strategy and the achievement of such status fosters the use of insider strategies. But we nevertheless suspect there are analytical benefits to be derived from the separation of the terms. For example, in his discussion of environmental groups Vogel (1986, p. 276) observes that, 'Despite the increased willingness of British community and environmental organizations to challenge government policies publicly, most continue to rely on 'insider' political strategies'.

Does the fact that environmental groups pursue such a strategy mean that they have insider status? Or are they outsiders pushing insider strategies in the hope that this may *win* them insider status? The scope for confusion in interpreting such (common) references to the insider/ outsider labels is considerable. In our view, status and strategy have become conflated; arguably this has led to ambiguity. The two dimensions require a distinct vocabulary. This might be sensibly attained by

explicitly attaching the insider/outsider terms to strategy, and developing a complementary set of terms to distinguish status dimensions from strategy ones.

While, as we have noted the insider/outsider strategy is (to a degree) a matter of selection by the group, status is ascribed by the bureaucracy. Group strategy is one of the criteria the bureaucracy uses in its judgement. Thus, a group cannot ascribe that status to itself, it is conferred on it by its governmental 'partner'. The literature we suspect over-emphasises the development of norms of behaviour as the key variable in gaining legitimacy. We doubt whether a civil servant would ignore a resource rich group because it had behaved irresponsibly in the past. In our view there are political costs involved when such groups are excluded.

In keeping the strategy and status terms analytically distinct, the strategy vocabulary would be: *1. Insider Strategy; 2. Outsider Strategy; 3. Thresholder Strategy*. As far as status is concerned the terms could be:

1. INSIDER STATUS
    (i) Core Insider Group
    (ii) Specialist Insider Group
    (iii) Peripheral Insider Group
2. OUTSIDER STATUS
    (i) Outsider Group by Ideology or Goal
    (ii) Outsider Group by Choice

This status classification attempts to make distinctions about the degree of acceptance for a group by the relevant Department. Insider status ranges from regularised participation on a wide variety of issues cognoate to a policy area (*i.e. core*) to participation in particular areas (*i.e. specialist*) to participation that has the insider form but little, if any, influence (*i.e. peripheral*).

Core insiders are seen as important and relevant sources by policy makers over a broad policy area. Such groups (*e.g.* the National Farmers' Union or the British Medical Association) are involved in bargaining/exchange based relationships with policy makers. Not all influential insider groups will be as regularly involved in policy bargaining as a group such as the NFU. These specialist participants have a more specific interest in restricted policy areas but are seen by policy makers as a reliable and authoritative source of information (*e.g.* the British Poultry Meat Federation) in these niches. They are likely to be consulted routinely on most issues, even though policy makers realise that their significant influence is confined to a particular topic. The difference between the NFU and the British Meat and Poultry Federation, for example, is that the NFU operates in a *range* of policy niches: *i.e.* it has more major issues which it can credibly address as an insider.

If core insiders respond in detail to issues which are pertinent to their expertise they will be involved in a meaningful bargaining/dialogue with decision makers. If however, they respond to proposals which are outside their recognised areas they may find that they have very little influence. Many invitations are sent out by civil servants because of the unwritten informal doctrine that it is better to over- rather than under-consult. The wider the portfolio of issue niches the more regular the involvement in policy community type politics is likely to be.

We recognise of course that different group niches may overlap despite the ambition of each organization to market its expertise as distinctive. A group such as the NFU which has a catholic interest in agricultural policy-making may find its expertise upstaged by another specialist insider group which is more focused on the issue at hand. So clearly, the absence of competing views on an issue – or competing sources of expertise – can determine the degree of insider influence over policy. If there is limited competition then the group can expect to have greater policy influence. This may be especially true for single issue groups which can become unchallenged core insiders in a small, distinct area of policy. For example, the Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society (SANDS) had the definition of a stillbirth lowered from 28 to 24 weeks by the Still-Birth (Definition) Act, 1992. As a result parents of babies born dead after 24 weeks gestation are entitled to a stillbirth certificate, a funeral, burial or cremation, and Statutory Maternity Pay and Maternity Allowance if the mother qualified. They had to take pains to present this issue in a way that would not have the technical change caught up in the abortion controversy.

As Browne argues (1991a, p. 347), the more an organization stakes out narrow policy claims, defines its identity in terms of expertise over their claims, fixes its political assets within only that specific range of identifiable problems, and provides a variety of issues (and related services to policy makers), the less its key issue positions will be contested and challenged. But breadth too is a policy making strength and the major core players do not restrict themselves to the narrowest issues where they would have unchallenged authority. Broad organizations are more likely to bump up against policy competitors, but the most influential bodies are not necessarily the narrowest in scope.

As set out above (in context of a discussion about consultation on the development of the Engineering Council) we accept as peripheral insider groups the sort of body whose relevance to a topic is seen by civil servants to be marginal. We argue that they are insider groups because they do not utilise any of Dunleavy's (1991) 'high-cost' political strategies, and because the relevant part of the bureaucracy accepts them as legitimate (even if comparatively uninfluential) participants in the

process. We would also include in this category the 'no-hope' cases or failed insiders. These are groups which pursue insider strategies but have little or *no impact* on the thinking of civil servants. Given the low threshold for entry to consultation lists we believe that most groups who wish insider status can, relatively easily, develop the necessary degree of political sophistication to attain peripheral insider status. Consultation of these groups is largely a cosmetic exercise. In most cases it would cause the official more problems to ignore the failed insiders than it would to extend them polite recognition.

Thus, core insider groups are those organizations who have policy-making influence. Some groups are involved in negotiations over policy on a regular basis while the involvement of others is more sporadic. Peripheral insider refers to those groups found on consultation lists and granted a cosmetic type status of 'insiders', but whose influence over policy development will be marginal at best.

Outside status refers to groups who do not participate in insider style politics and is perceived in a dichotomised form – *Outsider by Ideology or Goal* and *Outsider by Choice*. It is usually 'self-selected' by the group through its adoption of *goals* that cannot be accommodated in the consultative process (e.g. Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament). This view on the origins of outsider status is the corollary of seeing insider status as related to consultation. If one is making claims that cannot be resolved in that sort of bargainable and incremental manner, then insider status is not an option.

The second type of outsider (Outsider by Choice) may make an explicit policy decision not to become (or to be perceived as) 'ensnared' in a cozy relationship with policy makers (*e.g.* Greenpeace). If the goal is realisable through bargaining, this choice might seem perverse, but there may be reasons in terms of the internal maintenance of the organization that might push a group in this direction. To recruit (or keep) membership it may be more important for some groups to be seen as publicly active (i.e. by pursuing Dunleavy's high-cost actions) even though this is likely to prevent success in the policy process.

4. Can Interest Groups Really Choose Strategies?

Overall the literature suggests two main routes to influence – inside and outside channels (with the inside channel seen as more likely to be effective) – and with groups having a realistic choice of strategy. Schlozman and Tierney (1986) (like Grant, 1978) present groups as having a choice over which strategies to pursue, *i.e.* insider or outsider:

. . . an organization may have extensive strategic and tactical choices. Although the institutional arena in which political conflict will be waged is sometimes

settled in advance by the actions of others, when an organization has a choice, it will try to locate a political conflict in the setting most likely to produce favourable results. Once strategic matters have been settled, an organized interest still must choose among assorted political tactics (Schlozman and Tierney, 1986, p. 169).

Dunleavy (1991 p. 21) also sees groups as having a choice, but with a bias to the pursuit of insider-style participation:

Group leaders want to be able to influence decision-making in its earliest formative stages, before key political actors have adopted fixed public positions . . . Hence they strive to achieve an 'insider' position with government agencies and the legislature, cultivating a responsible image.

However, there is an important thread to the literature which suggests that the choice of strategy is less open than it initially appears. Walker (1991) and May and Nugent (1982) identify several 'crucial environmental factors' which guide this sort of 'strategic choices'. Walker identifies four factors:

(1) the degree of conflict in the political environments they face (changing relationships with changes in political administrations).
(2) the groups' internal organizational resources (size of group's staff and the 'existence of local chapters or subunits'). The larger the size of a group's staff the greater the propensity to pursue an insider strategy, whilst the existence of subunits pushes organizations towards outsider strategies. His data demonstrated the 'powerful influence' which a large central staff exerted on the organization to engage in insider lobbying, whilst decentralised subunits had little discernible impact.
(3) Citizen groups tended to favour outsider strategies while groups within the 'profit sector' tend towards insider strategies.
(4) the principal sources of their financial support (membership dues or 'dependence on patrons') (Walker, 1991, p. 9 and pp. 111–118).

May and Nugent (1982, p. 7) argue that strategies are the *consequence* of the interplay of two sets of factors. First, environmental factors, which include:

(i) the structure of the decision making machinery of public authorities – centralised or decentralised;
(ii) policies being pursued by decision-makers; and
(iii) the extent of group access granted by decision-makers.

Secondly, group characteristics, which include:

(i) (the perception) of whether group goals are moderate or radical and to what extent they fit with the goals being pursued by decision-makers;
(ii) the strategic importance of the group (power and sanctions);
(iii) group membership *i.e.* size, solidarity, extent of 'proper norms of behaviour'; and

(iv) group organization *i.e.* degree of centralisation, leader-membership relationship.

Walker (1991) suggests that a group's 'choice' is constrained, most notably, by its finance and membership characteristics. He argues that much of the representation of choice in the literature over an organization's choice of strategies is accordingly false. He suggests insider strategies are pursued by professional organizations because their membership wish to 'protect their professional standing and the requirements of organizational maintenance arising from their close association with federal agencies encourage' these groups to adopt a strategy of conflict avoidance through (covert) privileged access channels' (Walker, 1991, p. 106). In our view, for groups with incremental demands the appropriate means of influencing policy is by insider negotiations over detail. So it is the nature of their demands on the political system that determines their strategy: they do not have a realistic choice between inside and outside strategies.

We see this line of argument as incompatible with much writing that implies there is choice. Strategy is to a large extent determined by the nature of the policy demand. As Newton (1976) notes regarding 'unestablished' groups, were they to gain access they are unlikely 'to be satisfied with the results'. Policy change is likely to be too incremental for them, and they may not wish to become embroiled into a relationship which could be perceived as 'too cozy'. Newton (1976) argued that 'the rules of the game' imposes restrictions on group demands. He maintained that most groups made rather incremental and 'piecemeal demands' rarely seeking 'wide ranging changes in public policy'. They were also quite 'happy' if they managed to secure half of what they demanded (Newton, 1976, p. 71). Dearlove (1973) came to a similar conclusion in his case study when he argued that an aggressive 'improper' approach is likely to be 'prompted by the nature of their support base and the particular ideology of the group leaders' (Dearlove, 1973, p. 169).

Walker argued that 'idea' or 'cause' groups contain individuals who are bound together only by their attachment to a specific cause or idea (outsiders by choice). The extent of their participation is liable to be restricted to membership contributions. Such organizations then can be seen as having two crucial, symbiotically intertwined goals: the securing of funds from a geographically disparate membership to ensure organizational survival, and the pursuit of goals which meet the organizational *raison d'être* and consequently maintain the flow of membership funds. These two factors cannot be divorced. Failure in either area may lead to organizational failure and disbandment. Thus, such

organizations are to a large extent forced into pursuing an outsider strategy because the perception of effort (whether it be seen as successful or effective, or just keeping an issue alive) is *all* in terms of member motivation. For the idea or cause group, the imperative of members' satisfaction inevitably leads to an outsider type campaign aimed at 'public persuasion and political mobilization'. And of course, the continual reinforcement of the existing memberships' commitment to the cause.

Walker is essentially arguing that internal organizational demands reduce the area of choice about strategy's relationship to the wider political system (see also Godwin, 1992). Thus Greenpeace has a policy of not negotiating with government or business combined with its high profile public 'stunts' aimed at satisfying its membership as much as achieving any policy success.

The history of a group's formation will also be a crucial factor in determining the strategies it pursues. As Walker (1991) has pointed out groups which begin by pursuing their goals through 'grass roots and political mobilization' may find it very difficult (especially in the short-run) to 'shift' to an insider strategy, for two main reasons. First, as we have just seen organizational maintenance may be threatened if the organization's voice is not being heard loudly or clearly enough. Secondly, the group/officials are likely to lack the necessary political sophistication required to pursue such a strategy (Walker, 1991, p. 107). Though these barriers are not insurmountable and groups may change strategy if circumstances allow, it is a constrained choice. Walker's (1991) data (which produced similar results to Schlozman and Tierney's [1986]) lead him to conclude:

... that interest groups tend to choose strategies that are compatible with their organizational form ... decentralized organizations that maintain local chapters or subunits are likely to increase their use of outside strategies ... the groups most likely to adopt inside strategies are those in the profit sector that maintain large staffs ... while the groups least likely to follow the inside pathway to influence are those citizen groups with few organizational resources (Walker, 1991, pp. 117–119).

Walker's (1991) evidence appears to be at odds with 'unfettered' group choice beliefs. He maintained that his data demonstrated that groups develop a 'preferred style' of strategy during their early development and that once an approach is chosen the group may find it very difficult 'to move in a new direction':

Choice made early in the history of a group establish a strategic style that restricts innovation, largely because political strategies are so intertwined with other basic organizational decisions ... The tactics adopted by interest groups

are part of a general strategy of organizational maintenance, as much a part of the organization's character as its choice of issues (Walker, 1991, pp. 119–120).

The literature on British insiders and outsiders has, on the whole, implied that the move from insider to outsider status can be an evolutionary one. As outsiders' political, technical and logistical skills improve so does their chance of becoming insiders. Thus, Newton (1976, p. 47) maintains that a group which adheres to the 'rules of the game' is 'likely to become established sooner or later'. We agree that longevity and confirmity are likely to produce acceptance, but the group must also develop political resources, more importantly, have 'appropriate' goals (i.e. goals that are relatively uncontroversial), and be prepared to accept that change is likely to be achieved on an incremental basis. Mimicking insider strategies alone is unlikely to secure core insider status, but it may lead to peripheral insider status.

5. Conclusions

Groups need government to deliver authoritative decisions and governmental policy makers need groups to facilitate the formulation of a workable and effective policy. It is true that groups need to be formally invited into the decision making system but the demonstration of certain 'norms of behaviour' is not the key variable. A group has a set of political goals. It will depend on the nature of these goals whether these could be better advanced in the interest group/bureaucratic world of the 'logic of negotiation' or in the more overtly political world of a public protest campaign. Thus, groups who wish to pursue radical policy change exclude themselves by definition from participating in the insider, political accommodation game. The pursuit of 'incremental' style goals gives a group eligibility for legitimate insider status. The key variable, to securing core rather than peripheral status is however, that of resources. The civil servant's blank piece of paper requires filling-in. The group-government relationship is exchange-based; government offers groups the opportunity to shape public policy, while groups provide government with certain resources (*e.g.* knowledge, technical advice or expertise, membership compliance or consent, credibility, technical advice or expertise, membership compliance or consent, credibility, information, implementation guarantees) which it needs to secure a workable policy. The provision to government of valuable resources which it lacks, coupled with incremental goal objectives drives the group to seeking insider status.

The logic of accommodation leads inevitably to certain behavioural norms. Grant's emphasis on the group's deliberate selection of insider

strategy then is an over-emphasis on the degree of choice. Within policy community style politics the process of policy change can be characterised as bargainable incrementalism. Acceptance of this principal rule – premised upon the shared attitudes and values of community members – shapes participants' behaviour. If bargainable incrementalism is not acceptable then groups must find another mode through which to pursue their goals. A group which rejects bargainable incrementalism excludes itself from that policy making arena. Thus, it is the (incremental) process of policy change which drives behaviour.

'Pragmatic' goals and the possession of what government perceives as a useful resources base created eligibility for ascribed status. On such status being ascribed, the logic of accommodation inevitably, and to a certain extent inexorably, leads groups to continue to behave in a certain manner, because the relationships with government (and other groups for that matter) exist over time and across many more issues in the future, some of which will be much more significant to the group. Whereas outsider groups may be content to raise the political temperature on an issue on an irregular basis and may demand once-and-for-all changes to policy, insider groups are usually interested in the long term picture. They are realistically interested in obtaining some of what they want most of the time, rather than the less realistic prospect of one big pay day.

In this sort of discussion too much is lost if the distinction between inside status and insider strategy is conflated. We argue that consultation is the prominent policy making routine in British politics – a pattern scarcely touched by supposed Thatcherite antipathy to groups. Access to this system is not difficult and we see the major cleavage in the group world between groups with real influence and those without: too much of the literature assumes that the cleavage is between insider and outsider groups. This suggests the outsider category is important because their is exclusion by government on ideological grounds. It is doubtful if this is a very relevant aspect.

Our emphasis is on making distinctions about the influence of groups once they have met the minimalistic requirements for insider status. Civil servants look for characteristics which will assist in policy making. These may be technical knowledge of the policy area, relevant information, or assistance in determining the 'acceptability' of the policy. Some groups will be relevant for most issues in 'their field' (but not always successful in securing acceptable outcomes), while others will be influential on specialist policy niches. Many other groups are engaged in comment in a peripheral manner. It is logically impossible that in an exercise of several hundred consultees all have genuine influence, but organizations appear bound into the process because they are reluctant to give up even marginal

influence, sometimes. At the worst, involvement in such exercises give participants advance warning about likely policy developments – though they can do little to influence these changes.

Our instinct is that the attention of students of policy making needs to be focused on the unpredictable circumstances when peripheral insider groups have influence – rather than endorsing or furthering a myth that the policy making world divides into those insiders with guaranteed influence and outsiders excluded by a powerful state.

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