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The Dual Motives of Interest Group Research

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THE DUAL MOTIVES OF INTEREST GROUP STUDIES

I have reached that point in life in which I have become one of the examples I teach: I am now eligible for membership of AARP and, in order to get discounted rates in hotels, may well accept it. This traumatic development has prompted me to look backwards at many aspects of my life, my academic interests included.¹

The main point of this paper inspired by my retrospection is that interest group studies has been the product of at least two intellectual motives. This duality of motivation among interest group scholars is by no means a weakness but an advantage making the field an unusually rich and stimulating field in which to operate.

The First Motive: Understanding Political Behavior

Perhaps the most obvious motive for studying interest groups is that they are a conspicuous and many believe important aspect of the political environment. Many citizens join interest groups, often claiming that they do so in order to influence politics. It is natural that we political scientists should study this activity. The United States has long been seen as a setting that is congenial for interest groups. It is almost mandatory in writing on the subject to do what I shall now do and invoke Tocqueville's claim² that Americans have an unusually vibrant civil society, that they are particularly likely to form organizations to address problems. Whether the organizations that Tocqueville

¹ For an authoritative survey of American research on interest groups see Frank Baumgartner and Beth Leech *Basic interests : The Importance of Groups in Politics and in Political Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958.)

² Alexis de Tocqueville, *De La Democratie en Amerique* (Paris: Bordas, 1973.)

celebrated for instilling in their members the values and skills of democratic politics have much in common with many of today's interest groups whose "members" are merely people who can be stimulated through outrage or even hatred into sending fairly nominal sums to a post office box in DC may be doubted. I have also long suspected that some of the claims made in comparative studies of participation that Americans are a nation of joiners is shaped partly by the greater social acceptability or desirability in the United States of claiming to belong to groups than is the case in Europe; after all, such studies regularly and without much comment similarly report that voter turnout in American elections is far in excess of what the actual voting returns show. None the less, joining interest groups is indeed a sufficiently common practice in the United States that it compels our attention. Moreover, other democracies seem to be becoming in this as in other respects more like America. One of my favorite facts about British politics is that the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) has more members than all the major political parties combined. The prominence of what Americans call public interest groups and others call Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) is evident throughout Europe, most recently at the G8 meetings in Genoa. The NGOs in Genoa could apparently be divided into two categories, categories which had unaccountably been neglected by political scientists, the *fluffies* committed to non violent action and the *spikies* whose tastes in political behavior are more eclectic.³ The stagnation and decline of interest in participating in political parties may suggest that the comparative importance of interest group (as opposed to other forms) of participatory politics is increasing.

³ *Financial Times* 18 July 2001 p 18.

A focus on interest groups as a form of political participation leads naturally to the study of who participates and why. Probably the most famous work on interest groups in the modern era, Mancur Olson's *Logic of Collective Action*⁴ addresses this issue. There is no particular point in rehearsing here the main points of his argument. As is well known, Olson's conclusion was that participation was problematic, not natural and spontaneous. His general argument had a bite because the groups that seemed to fit most obviously the conclusion that not all interests would be represented in the pressure group system were those committed to more general or public interests. Ironically, Olson's work was published immediately prior to the great flowering of public interest groups in the United States in the late 1960s and 1970s. However, this development did not necessarily invalidate Olson's arguments and a number of powerful foundations appear to have been demonstrably affected by Olson's arguments. Foundations provided, as Jack Walker⁵ noted, important seed money to help public interest groups form, and less clearly, to maintain themselves thereafter. Olson accomplished that rare achievement for a political scientist, influencing the real world. Moreover, his arguments were extended by Moe⁶ and Wilson⁷ in ways that made them more realistic. Wilson, for example, developed some ideas expressed only sketchily by Olson that incentives to join groups could be based on a quest for psychic, not merely material, satisfaction. The pleasures of joining with people like ones self (solidaristic satisfaction) or of merely standing up for

⁴ Mancur Olson *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (New York: Schocken, 1968.)

⁵ Jack Walker, *Mobilizing Interest groups in America : Patrons, Professions, and Social Movements* / Jack L. Walker, Jr. ; prepared for publication by Joel D. Aberbach ... [et al.]. (Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1991.)

⁶ Terry Moe *The Organization of Interests* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.)

⁷ James Q. Wilson *Political Organizations* (New York: Basic Books, 1974.)

one's beliefs (expressive satisfaction) were added to those of seeking material gain as motives for joining interest groups though arguably at the price of making the whole mode of analysis less compelling.

The insight that participation was not as easily common and as widely distributed as pluralists had supposed was not limited to those who, like Olson, adopted deductive approaches. The empirical work of scholars such as Verba and Nie⁸ demonstrated that political participation was unequally distributed among social classes, particularly in the United States. A gap existed in all advanced democracies between participation rates for the affluent and less affluent. However, the gap was particularly large in the United States. Thus empirical research combined with deductive analysis to suggest that the optimistic pluralist belief that all who had an interest to defend about which they cared were likely to join or form or join an interest group to do so was false. Having made this point, however, interest group scholars tended to move on, leaving it mainly to social movement scholars to explore when and why the less advantaged overcame their normal quiescence and mobilized.⁹ We should also note that although not limited to interest groups or even primarily intended as an argument about them, Putnam's¹⁰ famous argument that participation in voluntary organizations in the United States is declining has clear relevance to interest group studies. If (because of excessive television or

⁸ Sydney Verba and Norman Nie *Participation and Political Equality : A Seven-Nation Comparison* (Cambridge; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1978.)

⁹ See the works of Sydney Tarrow for an introduction to this field. Sidney G. Tarrow *Power in Movement : Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics* (Cambridge; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1994.)

¹⁰ Robert Putnam *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Touchstone, 2001.)

whatever), Americans are joining all types of voluntary organization less than in the past, interest groups will be affected as well as bowling leagues.

Concerns about the degree to which participation in interest groups was unequally distributed naturally encouraged a traditional concern in interest group studies, namely the degree to which interest groups accentuated inequality and inequities.

Schattschneider¹¹ had voiced the memorable objection to the pluralist heaven; the choir sang with an upper class accent. Generations of students were taught the argument that Lowi codified.¹² The power of interest groups allied with legislators whose constituents included their members and the relevant government agency in an “iron triangle,” Lowi contended, weakened the capacity of American government to achieve clear goals or to pursue common purposes. Iron triangles are no longer popular among political scientists, their firm sounding structures replaced in academic discourse by Hecllo’s more encompassing but mushy term “issue networks.”¹³ Iron triangles were alleged when they existed to give disproportionate power to the organized, but the organized could include groups such as farmers and teachers who are not among society’s most privileged. The more contemporary concern has been that unequal lobbying resources and above all, unequal ability to make campaign contributions distorts politics in favor of the rich and privileged.

¹¹ E.E. Schattschneider *The Semi Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1960.)

¹² Theodore Lowi *The End of Liberalism* 2nd ed., (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979.)

¹³ Hugh Hecllo "Issue Networks" in Anthony King (ed.) *The New American Political System* (Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978.)

Systematic studies of lobbying and lobbyists are relatively few, that by Robert Salisbury¹⁴ and associates being the most conspicuous. In contrast, we are inundated with studies of campaign contributions, at least of campaign contributions made by political action committees. Campaign contributions are of course an important means by which interest groups attempt to influence politicians either directly or as means of gaining access for their lobbyists. In spite of the methodological sophistication of many of the studies, no consensus has emerged on the impact of campaign contributions. Some studies suggest that votes in Congress change in response to increases in campaign contributions, others do not.¹⁵ The whole enterprise of studying PACs is bedeviled by questions about the direction of causality and difficulties in isolating the impact of campaign contributions from other influences on legislative behavior. Are contributions made to those who already agree or to those who adopt the interest group's position in return for a contribution? Are legislators motivated by a wish for a campaign contribution when they cast a vote or by ideology, arguments or even the opinions of their constituents? We have not been able to distinguish the relative importance of these factors, or rather we have been able to find different answers in different cases. Perhaps there is no one answer; as Lowi long ago contended, politics varies from policy area to policy area. PAC contributions may be significant in some cases but not in others.

It remains the case, however, that we are still lacking synoptic studies of interest group tactics and behavior. Even were it the case that contributions by PACs were highly

¹⁴ John P. Heinz, Edward Lauman, Robert Salisbury *The Hollow Core Private Interests in National Policy Making* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1993)

¹⁵ For a useful summary see Jack Wright *Interest Groups and Congress: Lobbying, Contributions and Influence* (Boston Allyn and Bacon, 1996) and the generally

effective in influencing politicians, it would not necessarily be the case that they are the only effective tactic. We know that interest groups use a variety of tactics. Interest groups lobby, give both hard and soft money, bring court cases, support political parties, try to influence the media, the general public and contact government officials. In addition, some interest groups use tactics such as strikes, marches, demonstrations, engage in civil disobedience and in general act in ways that we interest group scholars generally do not like to acknowledge. We have little sense of why and when interest groups use different tactics or how they fit together into some coherent strategy. Presumably someone is making a calculation that the interests of the XYZ corporation are better served by hiring an additional lobbyist than by strengthening the legal department, by building up the PAC than by giving more money to a trade association. We know too little about how and why these decisions are made by business or by other interests. Admittedly, for many interest groups these choices are highly constrained, for example by a shortage of money or by the need to demonstrate to the membership that the group is alive and active. For other interests (such as corporations) these choices are relatively unconstrained, however, and it would be valuable to understand better why they are made.¹⁶

invaluable survey of work on U.S. interest groups Frank Baumgartner and Beth Leech, *Basic Interests*.

¹⁶ For my own attempts to analyze why U.S. corporations behave the way they do, see Graham K Wilson "Corporate Political Strategies" *British Journal of Political Science* 20 (1990) 281-7. See also Neil Mitchell *The Conspicuous Corporation: Business, Public Policy, and Representative Democracy* (Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1997) and "Disaggregating and Explaining Corporate Political Activity: Domestic and Foreign Corporations in National Politics" *American Political Science Review* 94 (December 2000) 891-903. For a recent interesting study see Sandra Suarez *Does Business Learn? Tax Breaks, Uncertainty and Political Strategy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.)

We should note, however, the considerable strengths of the literature discussed briefly above. First, it displays the scholarly virtues of rigor in analysis as well as in empirical research. Second, it none the less raises important normative questions such as whether there are systematic biases in participation rates and in the power of groups that compromise the ideals of American democracy. Perhaps few other fields of American political science achieve this combination so well.

A Different Tradition; Sociological perspectives.

The discussion so far has focused on interest group activity as a form of political behavior. Citizens are join (or do not join) interest groups. Interest groups then engage in a variety of tactics in order to pursue their goals. There is, however, another tradition that we have not yet discussed. It is the sociological tradition of discussing how different societal interests relate to politics and the state. These relationships may not be evident in political behavior. In pre-democratic (but parliamentary) Britain, for example, the dominant landed aristocracy that controlled politics did not need to lobby itself to insure that its interests were taken into account even though those interests (as with the repeal of the Corn Laws) were not necessarily decisive.¹⁷ In its most famous form, this perspective has argued that the state has a structural dependence on business; the need to attract and retain investment capital forces the state to accommodate the interests and values of business.

This perspective has scarcely been invisible, in spite of the more paranoid musings of some of its adherents. We might say that the structural perspective, long

debated in Marxist circles, was popularized by a holder of one of the most prestigious chairs in one of the most prestigious departments in the United States, namely Charles Lindblom of Yale. Lindblom¹⁸ coined the phrase "privileged position" to describe the power that business derived from the risk that unfavorable public policies would cause it to switch investment and employment to a more favorable location. Some here may remember the tremendous attention that Bachrach and Baratz¹⁹ received for their then fashionable but vague argument that the power of business was sufficiently great to keep off the agenda entirely any proposals that were damaging to its interests; Lukes expanded the argument even further to argue that the ideological hegemony of business was so great that proposals or ideas hostile to its interests could not even be formulated because capitalism had such a lock on people's minds.²⁰ An obvious if somewhat *ad hominem* objection to Lukes's arguments is that these books (presumably inimical to the interests of business) were written, published and placed prominently on the academic agenda. More ironically, the works of Lindblom, Lukes and Bachrach and Baratz on the invincibility of business achieved greatest prominence in the era in which business felt most on the defensive, the 1970s. These scholars would of course reply that business interests were not "really" threatened by the wave of regulation that hit American business in the 1970s. However, this argument is clearly circular. Whatever anyone (including business

¹⁷ See David Canadine *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.)

¹⁸ Charles E. Lindblom *Politics and Markets: The World's Political Economic Systems* (New York: Basic Books, 1977.)

¹⁹ Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz *Power and Poverty; Theory and Practice* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.)

²⁰ Steven Lukes *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974.)

executives) might say, business is not adversely affected by any policy that is adopted because, *a priori*, no policy hostile to business could be adopted.

In its less fundamentalist forms, the sociological perspective asks incredibly stimulating questions. Assuming that there must be some sort of a relationship between the state and major societal interests, how is that relationship organized and structured? Much writing in comparative political economy has shown that there is a substantial difference in the relationships between major economic interests such as business and unions on the one hand or the state on the other even among the advanced capitalist countries. Indeed, the analysis of these differences has been the focus of comparative political economy. Among the different models that have been distinguished are three that contrast sharply. The developmental state model is one in which government dominates a partnership with tightly organized businesses in pursuit of rapid economic growth; Japan and Korea are celebrated examples.²¹ In the neocorporatist countries such as Sweden, the Netherlands and more recently, Ireland, major economic interests, particularly labor and business make important policy decisions in partnership with government usually in attempting to combine policies geared to equity (full employment, a strong welfare state or a pattern of wage increases that promotes equality) with international competitiveness.²² Finally, in the more pluralist systems of which the United States is the exemplar, economic interests and government have a more distant

²¹ See Robert Wade *Governing the Market : Economic Theory and the Role of Government in East Asian Industrialization* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1990): Chalmers Johnson *MITI and the Japanese Economic Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy 1925-75* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1982.

²² See the collected volumes edited by Philippe Schmitter and Gerhard Lehmbruch *Patterns of Corporatist Policymaking* (London and Beverly Hills: Sage Publications,

relationship. Economic interests are seen as more external to policy making, as “pressure groups” trying to alter policy outcomes rather than as either subordinate (as in the developmental state) or more or less equal (as in neocorporatist countries) partners of government.

A voluminous literature assesses the state of these models. Whether or not any of these models generates superior economic performance and whether or not globalization or social change makes some of these models less practical or promote convergence on just one of them are questions that have been hotly debated for over a decade.²³ This is not the place to join that debate. Rather my purpose is simply to point out some implications of these debates for interest group scholars. First, and most obviously, these debates remind us that far from the United States being an exemplar of interest group politics, it is a special case. Its decentralized, competitive interest group system exemplified by the ways in which business is represented contrasts vividly with the neater, hierarchical patterns found in countries such as Sweden and Japan. Second, the study of the relationship between interests, even organized interests and government, is carried on by people who do not think of themselves as interest group scholars. People who write about the developmental state or about neocorporatism are, I would guess, much more likely to think of themselves as political economists than to think of

1982) as well as Peter Katzenstein *Small States in World Markets* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.)

²³ For an introduction see David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt and Jonathan Perraton *Global Transformation: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); L. Weiss *The Myth of the Powerless State* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Robert Boyer and Daniel Drache *States Against Markets: The Limits of Globalization* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); Jon Pierre and B Guy Peters *Governance, Politics and the State* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000.)

themselves as interest group scholars. Third, the debates about why these models are found in some places but not in others prompts all interest group scholars not only to describe the interest groups system they study but also to consider why it exists. Similarly, interest group scholars may encourage comparative political economists to be both more careful and more comprehensive in their work. Those familiar with the literature on neocorporatism, for example, will be aware that it is frequently imprecise in answering even such basic questions as which policy questions are subject to neocorporatist bargaining and which are not or how non economic interests such as environmental or feminist concerns are represented.

While neocorporatism continues in the real world, it is somewhat yesterday's man in academic life, fresh examples arise of approaches that from the point of view of the interest group scholar are of people speaking interest group prose without realizing it. The most important of these in recent years is the work of scholars adopting a network approach in their studies. Scholars such as Rhodes contend that the capacity of central institutions of the state to control and shape policy is limited. Policy is now typically the shaped by networks of officials and interests characterized by mutual dependence. As Rhodes writes

A policy network is a cluster of organizations connected to one another by resource dependencies . Policy networks matter; they are not another example of otiose social science jargon. All governments confront a vast array of interests. Aggregation of those interests is a functional necessity. Intermediation is a fact of everyday life in government. To describe and explain variations in patterns of intermediation is to explore one of the key governmental processes. Policy networks are one way of analyzing aggregation and intermediation; they are the oligopoly of the political market place.

Rhodes adds that policy networks have six consequences . These are limiting participation in the policy process, defining the role of actors, deciding which issues are

included and which excluded from the agenda, shaping the behavior of actors by establishing rules of the game, privileging certain interests not only by according them access but by favoring their policy preferences and substituting private for public accountability.²⁴

"Resource dependence" means that participants in the network bring to it resources for policy creation or implementation that other participants need. The real policy making process therefore differs considerably from constitutional theory.

The network approach is perhaps the vaguest and least developed that we have encountered. The key questions that are largely unanswered are numerous. What are the boundaries of the network and how are they set? What are the power relations among members of the network? Under what conditions is the network overwhelmed by external political forces, or are networks by definition never overwhelmed but merely expanded? These are crucial but in my view unanswered issues in the network approach. Whether or not given these questions the network approach will be able to sustain an important empirical research agenda may be questioned.

Yet, as the quotation from Rhodes above makes clear, there is much in the network approach with which interest group scholars will not only agree but be familiar. One of the basic questions that interest group scholars have long asked is who gets access and why. The network approach's concern to identify situations in which majority opinion may be thwarted by attentive interests is another classic issue in interest group studies. The network approach also has the virtue from the perspective of an interest

²⁴ R.A.W. Rhodes "Introduction: The ESRC Whitehall Programme; A Guide to Institutional Change" in R.A.W. Rhodes (ed.) *Transforming British Government* Vol 1

group scholar of recognizing the importance of the linkage between government agencies and interests, between state and society. Scholars in the network tradition emphasize the importance of resources that are not ostensibly political (expertise, administrative help, et cetera). However, the importance of these resources for interest groups in gaining access has long been recognized by eminent students of British interest groups such as Finer, Self and Storing. It is also evident in neocorporatist systems. Perhaps only in the study of U.S. interest groups do we think so instinctively of political resources such as campaign contributions and votes as defining interest group strength.

We interest group specialists have long learned that we must be tolerant of the intrusions of other parts of the profession; indeed we usually welcome them. Political economists, comparativists writing on neocorporatism and those working within the network tradition are particularly welcome “intruders” into the field of interest group studies. They remind us that one of the central concerns of our subfield should be to examine the inter-relationship not only of government and interest groups but between government and interests more generally. Their work tends to have several advantages over work on interest groups as a form of participation.

First, it tends to have a greater historical and comparative breadth. In contrast to the literature on PACs which might give one the impression that money was not a factor in US politics until 1974, writing on topics such as the developmental state or neocorporatism illuminates the dynamic, changing character of interest group politics.

Second, work in this tradition tends to be more aware that interest groups are not the only means through which interests are expressed. Writing on the developmental state

Changing Institutions (Houndmills; Macmillan, 2000) p. 10.

notes the role of the LDP as well as business or agricultural groups in representing interests and in creating a regime that favors business and rice farmers. Writing on neocorporatism has to take account of the fact that social democratic parties as well as unions claim to speak for workers and the working class. American political scientists are in general well aware that interests are represented by Senators and Representatives as well as by interest groups. The relationship between the representation of interests by interest groups and by other parts of the political system ought to be a fundamental part of our studies. Yet a focus on studying interest groups rather than the politics of interests tends to get in the way of turning this widely known fact about the American political system into scholarship. Refocusing on how interests such as women, business or labor relate to the state and politics would necessarily force us to look at the variety of ways in which interests are represented rather than continuing to make the assumption we all know to be false that interests are represented by interest groups.

Future Directions

My argument has been that there are at least two valuable traditions in interest groups studies. The first focuses on interest groups as an obvious subject for the usual sorts of questions political scientists ask; who engages in this behavior, why and with what consequences? The second tradition asks what the relationship is between government or the state on the one hand and major societal interests on the other. The second tradition is evident not only in explicit studies of interest group politics but in aspects of the discipline such as comparative political economy and the increasingly influential network approach to the study of policy making and executive politics.

Political scientists are by nature generally a tolerant group, and their natural inclination is to accept that all approaches have their virtues. Intellectual pluralism is generally a sound academic strategy as well as in this intolerant age commendable in principle. Academic pluralism can also be, however, a way of putting off difficult choices. After all, resources including time and money used on one approach are not available for another. It is worth asking what the current state of interest group studies is, and whether we have got the balance within it right.

I conducted a survey using Wilson Web of articles published in the two leading journals (*American Journal of Political Science* and the *American Political Science Review*) and then in all the generally respected journals (such as *Journal of Politics*.) In the last ten years the *APSR* and *AJPS* published three articles on interest groups; they also published seven articles on PACs. In the same period other respected American journals such as *Political Research Quarterly* or the *Journal of Politics* published four articles on interest groups generally and fourteen on PACs. Two comments seem justified. First, since the total numbers of articles on interest group politics is disappointing and, given the attention journalists and the public pay to the topic, remarkably low. Second, the balance of articles on interest group politics in general and on PACs seems almost grotesquely biased in favor of the latter. There are almost twice as many articles on PACS as on interest group politics in general in the two leading journals and over three times as many in other respected journals.

There are very few people writing on the relationship between economic forces such as business (or labor or farmers) and the state. We have teams of people working

away on PACs and other relatively obvious forms of interest group activity. What do we miss because of this emphasis?

First, and perhaps least importantly, we distance ourselves from the grand intellectual tradition that political sociology at present controls. Max Weber, for example, worried about the relationship between commerce and the state, not about interest groups. At the very least, recovering a connection with this tradition, however, would help us answer the “so what” question more convincingly; in spite of the prominence given to the topics, I doubt if any interest group scholar in the United States really believes that the abolition of PACs would change significantly the balance of power or the outcomes of public policy in that country. Yet if that is what we really believe, why do we persist in studying these topics and publishing articles about them?

Second, we tend to become focused on individual tactics rather than on the totality of an interest’s political activities. PACs as we all know are but part of the overall picture. Yet by studying PACs rather than the political activities of those interests that happen to use PACs as well as many other forms of political activity, we run the risk of missing the important overall picture.

Third, we slip into what may well be ultimately a highly ideological mode of thinking which asserts that by constructing a general category (interest groups, lobbyists et cetera) implies that there is more equivalence between interests than actually exists. Very few people would contend that business is an interest in the same way that a preservation society is. To be fair, studies of lobbying or political action committees bring out some of the inequalities that support that comment. Yet even if Lindblom exaggerated, we surely all feel that there is some way in which the relationship between

the state or government and certain interests has to be managed and attended to in a way that is not true for the relationship between government and many mass membership organizations.

Fourth, we position ourselves better to explore one of the central insights of the statist scholars; the state plays a vital role in structuring political activity, including the ways in which interests are organized and expressed. The ways in which interests such as business, or labor or farmers are expressed is not uniform but varies from country to country. The forms in which interests are expressed depends to a significant degree on the structure of the state itself and the policies that the state has adopted towards those interests. This insight has been used most fully by those political scientists writing on neocorporatism who have contended that it is shaped by the state, that the organization of interests into a neat, hierarchical pyramid of trade associations (or unions) and peak associations is not a "natural" consequence of the shape of the society in question but is instead a product of state structures and policies. Starting by focusing on the politics of interests rather than on interest groups helps us to see the ways in which the state has shaped their organization and expression.

Fifth, we position ourselves better to study the politics of interests in the new world of governance.²⁵ It is perhaps clearer in Europe than in the United States that we have moved from the relatively near world of governance through the nation state to a new order in which, while nation states continue to be of great importance, regional organizations notably the European Union and global organizations such as the WTO are of considerable significance as well. The nation state shares policy making "upwards"

²⁵ See Peters and Pierre and Peters, *op.cit.*

with regional or international organizations as well as "downwards" with increasingly significant subnational units of government. The familiar interest groups that we have studied in the past adapt to these changes with varying degrees of success. Interests may be represented not only by the not always impressive regional or fully international interest groups that have emerged but by governments, politicians or international bureaucrats. It is said, for example, that British farmers have turned to other European governments for assistance on some issues in preference to their own. One of the pressing items on our research agenda is to discuss how different interests fare in an era of globalization. Is it the case, as protesters claim, that the interests of workers or environmentalists are subordinated to those of business as globalization progresses? Or are a diverse range of interests, including environmentalists, able to adapt successfully to this new situation as Grant Jordan in his work on the Brent Spar episode may be suggesting?²⁶ Partly because national interest groups respond slowly and uncertainly to the changing forms of governance, a focus on the politics of interests rather than on interest groups would be more helpful.

A move towards studying the relationship between government and interests rather than studying interest group activity would be an improvement from these perspectives. Yet there would be obvious dangers. Perhaps the greatest is that interest group studies would become subject to the fact free theorizing that has characterized some of the works that I have cited above (but will not identify here!) Perhaps because of the echoes of Marxism, very often discussions of the relationship between the state and business, for example, have proceeded from a priori argument rather than from empirical

²⁶ Grant Jordan and Fred Ridley *Protest Politics: Cause Groups and Campaigns*

observation. As noted above, inconvenient facts are explained away by saying, for example that if business lost its “real” interests cannot have been at stake. The challenge will be, therefore, how to recapture the intellectual vigor the study of how interests relate to politics while avoiding reverting to the fact free theorizing that so often characterized that tradition.

What should empirical studies of the politics of interests look like? Obviously, it must include those factors with which we are familiar as students of interest groups -- lobbying, campaign contributions, links to government departments, use of the courts et cetera. However, the value of a study of the politics of interests will require us to step beyond this familiar territory. We should pay attention to the ways in which political actors such as legislators as well as interest groups promote or defend interests. We should look at how background factors such as the political culture or capital mobility advantage or disadvantage interests. I would argue that it is hard to imagine how we could make sense of the victories that public interest groups have achieved (as described so well by Jeffrey Berry²⁷) without paying attention to their ability to appropriate the label of standing for the public interest to supplement their material resources. The eagerness of Labour governments in Britain to please the City of London owes almost everything to the role of the City in the British economy and almost nothing to interest group tactics as described conventionally by political scientists. Finally, as noted earlier, we shall be able to focus on how government or the state helps shape and structure the representation of interests.

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.)

²⁷ Jeffrey Berry *The New Liberalism: The Rising Power of Citizen Groups* (Washington DC; Brookings Institution, 1999.)

This is a daunting task, asking us to focus much more widely than we have in the past. I believe, however, that this broader focus on the politics of interests will prove to be enormously rewarding intellectually.