

## Comments and Reviews:

### Hints on Escaping from the Slough of Despond: Reply to Jordan

Wyn Grant, University of Warwick

Jordan suggests that I am a 'pro-corporatist' (Jordan 1984, 138). It should be clear from my earlier work (Marsh & Grant 1977) that I am not a prescriptive pro-corporatist who believes that the transplantation of corporatist institutions to British soil would solve the country's economic problems (Grant & Nath 1984). Indeed, other writers more familiar with my work have criticised me for my opposition to tripartist solutions! (Metcalf 1984). I do confess to being an analytical pro-corporatist in the sense that I believe that the corporatist paradigm has triggered off an important and stimulating debate on the ways in which political structures attempt to cope with economic and social change. The debate about the paradigm has, in my view, given a much needed stimulus to the comparative study of interest organization and has led (and will lead) to a number of works which will be of considerable empirical value whatever one thinks of their theoretical underpinnings.

Jordan draws attention to 'the ambivalence of the state in the model' (Jordan, 1984, 138). However, I think that this ambivalence is not the product of uncertainty and confusion in the minds of corporatist theorists, but reflects a real ambivalence in the external political world. As a number of empirical studies have shown, the division between the public and the private has become more and more confused and uncertain. Hence, the boundaries of the state become less clear, and the notion of 'the state' becomes more difficult to deploy with any precision in empirical research (see Schmitter, forthcoming, for a more extended consideration of these problems).

Jordan refers to the argument that corporatism 'is a concept for intra country comparison' (Jordan 1984, 151), but does not pursue this point any further. In fact, one of the most important uses of the corporatist paradigm must be in the study of comparative government. Countries can be placed on the kind of continuum developed by Crouch which even Jordan has to grudgingly admit has some value. Despite Jordan's claim that 'there is in fact little in the Austrian case to encourage Schmitter' (Jordan 1984, 148) one could make out a case for

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treating Austria as a paradigm of liberal or bargained corporatism (see Martin, forthcoming). Equally, it is interesting to look at countries which have shifted away from liberal or bargained corporatism, e.g., the Netherlands in the 1980's compared with the 1950's.

Jordan is somewhat dismissive of the discovery of extensive corporatist practices at the meso-level, describing it as a 'modest' (Jordan 1984, 151) claim for corporatism. This dismissal comes strangely from someone who has used 'sectorisation' as one of the five main features of the British policy style (Jordan & Richardson 1982). The work by Jordan and by others has drawn attention to the way in which modern government is often conducted through a series of policy communities. Corporatist approaches provide a means of examining this important phenomenon of sector governance. (The various studies of the dairy sector emerging from the International Institute of Management project on business interest associations are a good example.) Moreover, sector governance can be an important distinguishing characteristic of a national policy style, as Jordan himself appears to acknowledge in earlier work.

Readers may recall that in Bunyan's allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Bunyan 1678), Christian and Pliable fall into the Slough of Despond. Such are the confusions of the corporatist debate, not helped by some of its critics (not Jordan), that the unwary intellectual traveller may indeed feel that he has fallen into a slough of despond. In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Pliable got out again on the side next to his own house, leaving Christian to 'possess the brave country' beyond the wicket gate on the other side of the slough. There are those who will be glad to climb out on the side they fell in, and to return to the security of tried and trusted theories; the more intellectually adventurous will want to press on and 'possess the brave country'. The intellectual energy expended on the corporatist debate will have been of no avail if the participants do not climb out on the side opposite to that from which they fell in. Like Christian in Bunyan's allegory, we cannot be sure what lies beyond the wicket gate, but eventually we shall have to open it.

To use the more prosaic language of social science, corporatism is a transitional paradigm and will eventually be replaced by a new explanatory synthesis which will, however, benefit from the theoretical speculations and empirical work stimulated by the debate on corporatism. The paradigm of 'associative order' advanced by Streeck & Schmitter (1984) is one direction in which work might proceed, whilst it may also be possible to utilise the concept of organizational development in exploring the behaviour of interest associations (Coleman & Grant 1984). At least we can proceed in the knowledge that Jordan admits that there is 'a subject deserving of study' (Jordan, 1984, 152).

I make no apology for using the term 'intellectual skinhead'; political science is in great danger of becoming very boring in its middle age and we would

benefit from more colourful language of this kind. There is a risk that sweeping critiques of the corporatist paradigm will stunt it before it has been fully developed theoretically or tested empirically; pluralism was able to develop over a longer period in a less immediately critical climate. To use Jordan's analogy, if there is one virus from which we are all at risk, it is the intellectual confusion which characterises so much of pluralism. There are so many pluralist positions that it represents a constantly moving target which it is easy to defend and hard to attack. Corporatism is not without its confusions, some of which it may have caught from pluralism, but I would argue that it does represent a more coherent body of thought than Jordan is prepared to allow. Making that claim does not make me a pro-corporatist, simply someone who would like to see the focus of disputation switch from the question of who has the most coherent theory to the new paradigms that can be developed from the debate to enhance our understanding of the pattern of relationships between the state and organized interests arising from the division of labour, and how that pattern differs from one society to another.

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