

Comments and Reviews

Corporate Pluralisms and Corporatist Concertation

Grant Jordan, University of Aberdeen

With regard to Wyn Grant's comment (1985) on my earlier article (Jordan 1984) on corporatism and corporate pluralism, I cannot much complain. I am glad that so little of substance seems to divide us. The gist of the original article was, of course, that corporatist theory needs to take account of earlier work instead of seeking to replace it with 'an explicit alternative to the (existing) paradigm of interest politics' (Schmitter 1979).

I found it remarkable that Wyn chose to frame his remarks in terms of analogy to Bunyan's religious allegory. The metaphor is engaging but it did bring to mind Ricci's account of Kuhn's argument that in paradigm change, 'acceptance is a sociological event rather than a methodological step ... Thus, much as when individuals convert from one religious faith to another, a scientific "conversion experience" is not dependent upon proof or error ... change of heart is at least partly an act of "faith", ... there can be no conventional proof that the new paradigm is really superior to the old' (Ricci 1984, 194). Perhaps this is why 'debate' on the new paradigm has been so frustrating; it is a matter of faith not evidence.

While agreeing with Wyn that political science is in danger of middle age boredom, colourful language is not going to be sufficient a cure. The problem is the content not the language. Take for example his Bunyan device. I hope he doesn't read on. Bunyan's other main work was, 'The Holy War'. And does the literary approach help his case? After the Slough of Despond, poor Christian had still to face the Hill of Difficulty, the Valley of Humiliation, Giant Despair, Vanity Fair and other episodes. Though Wyn presents himself as Christian it was Hope not Christian who was obliged to ask, 'Why are thou so tart my brother?'

Like Obstinate, I am rather inclined to reject the journey through the mirey slough, 'I will be no companion of such misled fantastical fellows'. I think it is of the Jordan that Bunyan records, 'they thought that it tasted a little bitterish to the palate; but it proved sweet when it was down'. And is Wyn really resting his case on this analogy. It ends ... 'behold it was a dream'.

The game of Bunyan hunting thus has endless possibilities but seems of limited utility. In any case I am concerned to end the contest before Wyn discovers:

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The game of Bunyan hunting thus has endless possibilities but seems of limited utility. In any case I am concerned to end the contest before Wyn discovers:

'Take heed, also, that thou be not extreme
In playing with the outside of my dream
Nor let my figure or similitude
Put thee into laughter or a feud
Leave this for boys and fools ...'

Perhaps as a final text we can build from Bunyan's

'What of my dross thou findest there, be bold
To throw away, but yet preserve the gold ...'

The purpose of this note is reconciliation, but habits are hard to break and one notes McBride's recent article in *Political Studies* (1985, 439-456), which has among its arguments, 'the insistence on formal, legislatively sanctioned measures has missed the whole point about corporatism (as practiced) — its informality, its *ad hoc*, subtle and flexible structures and variable modes of operation'. McBride also notes, 'Some writers may escape this difficulty by diluting the role of the state is said to play in "societal" corporatism and lowering the threshold of formality with which that role is supposedly played. But this drastically reduces the concept's distinctiveness from pluralism and lays such writers open to precisely the same criticisms as are directed against the pluralists, in particular their inability to adequately conceptualize the role state does play'.

This note is, however, principally about a step in the corporatist camp that can only be described, in the light of Wyn's metaphor, as ecumenical. In two papers Lehbruch (1984 & 1985) has made a move that transforms the discussion by making a distinction between *sectoral corporatism* and *corporatism concertation*. Lehbruch links sectoral corporatism to 'organizational participation in government' (Olsen 1983). He describes the phenomenon as quite 'common' and describes it as, 'Regular consultation of governments with interest organizations over legislation concerning their particular clientele, representation of the organisations in advisory committees or boards that participate in sectoral policy formation and implementation. Sectoral corporatism, in this sense is a relatively old phenomenon...'. This description of sectoral interests and their relations with governments appears to be in the direct tradition of discussions of domesticated pressure groups, segmented pluralism, policy sub-government, etc., and to argue about the term to be used to describe this would be to confuse the substance with the label.

Once Lehbruch hives-off this form of sectoral corporatism, it underlines the novelty of the corporatist concertation concept, which he presents as having two essential features:

- (1) it involves not just a single organized interest with privileged access to government, but rather a plurality of organizations usually representing antagonistic interests; and
- (2) these organizations manage their conflicts and co-ordinate their action with that of government expressly in regard to the systematic (gesamtwirtschaftliche) requirements of the national economy (p. 11).

Of course, there could be an element of wishful thinking on my part, but as I read this distinction by Lehmbruch, it seems a fuller exposition of the point I struggled to make in my earlier article (1984, 152).

'For example the corporatist literature pays significantly more attention to economic tripartism or concertation than is to be discovered in pluralist sources. But, at the same time, policy sectorization, group integration and consultation are not themes in themselves distinctive enough to constitute a new, rather than extended method of analysis'. 'Sectorized corporatism is somewhat more modest a label than the banner of a *system* of interest intermediation ... The sort of explanations that might be appropriate to account for the development of close interest group-departmental relations in one sector might be very different from those hypothesized for a *system* of corporatism' (1984, 151). In other words what *is* new is the corporatist concertation, and the pattern was confused by the inclusion of the sectorized form under the same umbrella. This present distinction perhaps explains why Wyn Grant was unable to understand my lack of enthusiasm for corporatism as an intra-country tool and for 'sector governance'. The distinguishing feature of corporatism is surely its supra-sectoral quality.

Arguably one can extract two further *distinguishing* features of corporatism from Lehmbruch's new article:

- (3) 'government intervention is no longer limited to mere sector protectionism but takes the form of deliberate attempts at co-ordinating macro-economic parameters' (Lehmbruch 1985, 13).
- (4) 'the large organizations are consulted in all important legislative matters (for example, labour and business organizations have a quite important voice in educational policy) and they are represented in advisory committees for the most important policy sectors' (Lehmbruch 1985, 12) Some interest groups are thus *generalists* (Lehmbruch cites Bjurulf & Swahn 1980).

Whereas some writers in the corporatist school have suggested that corporatism is related to the basic needs of capitalism (Schmitter 1979, Cawson 1978, 194), the evidence rather suggests that corporatism is more difficult to orchestrate in the areas of the macro-economy than in specific sectors such as agriculture, or housing, or particular industries. If anything there is an inverse relationship between the importance of an issue and the degree of corporatism (Jordan 1981, 112). Lehmbruch's new proposition is thus useful in this discus-

sion. Corporatism is not something that happens where capitalism requires it — leaving pluralism elsewhere in the system — but successful corporatism, ‘pre-supposes a strong capacity for intra-organizational co-ordination and a high degree of representational monopoly at the level of sectoral interests’ (Lehmbruch 1985, 12). In other word it is difficult to imagine corporatist concertation without a well developed pre-existing sectoral pattern.

The burden of this note to date is to claim that a relatively easy resolution of the corporatist/pluralist ‘debate’ is possible in terms of sectoral corporatism — segmented pluralism. These are near enough to be neatly absorbed as corporate pluralism. Empirically this is found widely. Some will no doubt argue that there is still an issue of control within the sectors via the group (to make it any kind of corporatism at all). However, control is perhaps not a major issue in sectoral corporatism if they are essentially clientelistic devices.

Problems remain to my mind in the operationalization of the concept of corporatist concertation. For example, Lehmbruch begins his article by observing the rejection by the British government of established forms of consultation and the abolition of many ‘quangos’. Work currently being conducted by Jeremy Richardson and myself would make us loath to make such a bold assertion about the rejection of consultation by the present government.

The current Director General of the National Economic Development Office gives a very strong argument in favour of NEDC as being a *more effective* body now than hitherto — describing ‘patient and farsighted collaboration’ (Cassels 1985). Chris Hood’s article (1981) showed that the Pliatzky review of ‘quangos’ in Britain was not, as Lembruch suggests, an exercise in ‘abolition’.

Exactly how does one decide that groups are participating with a mind to ‘the requirements of the national economy’? It is all very well for the rhetoric to be of the national interest, while short run and self interested consideration is at the heart of the process. Do effective ‘controlling’ interest groups make the corporatist system work or do we judge them effective because there is economic success?

Nonetheless the content of Lehmbruch’s work and its tone suggest that the study of interest groups can proceed on a new common ground — if not the Enchanted Ground of Bunyan. However, in one final sense I must part company from Wyn Grant’s the Slough of Despond. There is in his note a sense of progress through adversity. We need rather to put corporatism in the context of Golembiewski’s comment that political science and the social sciences in general are characterized by a fantastic discontinuity — one of the unfortunate consequences (and causes) of the research trends which periodically sweep across them (1960, 971). This pessemistic belief is why Wyn Grant’s note is welcome; connections must be attempted between the research trends of the subject.

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