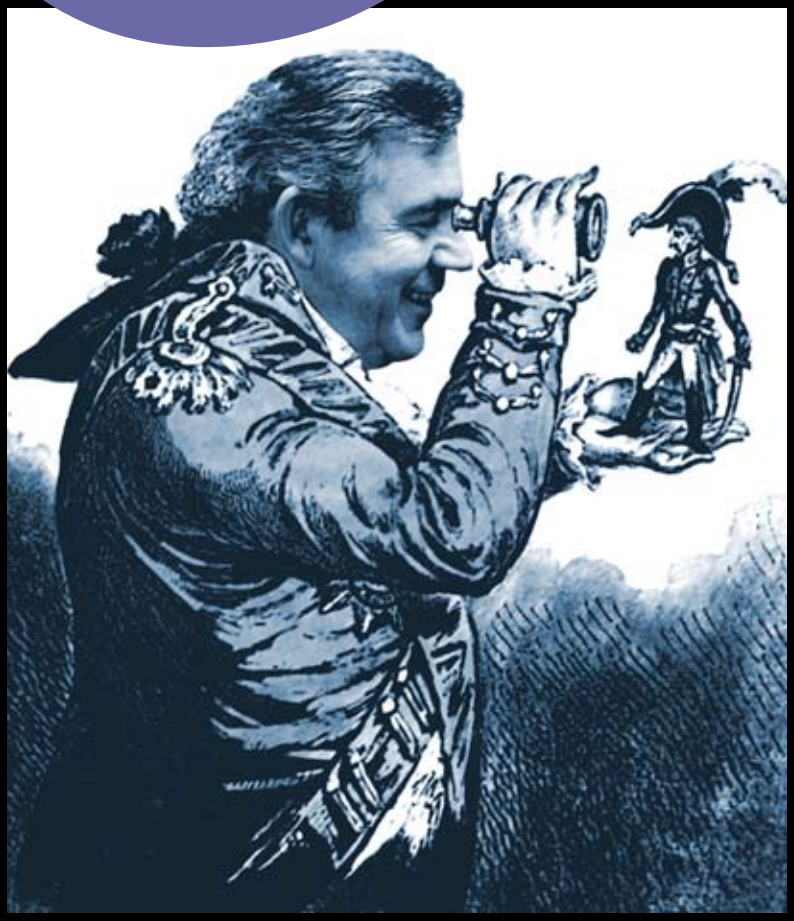
Power & Participation

IN MODERN BRITAIN



David Beetham, Andrew Blick, Helen Margetts and Stuart Weir

A Literature Review by Democratic Audit

An internal Democratic Audit paper, February 2008

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by Democratic Audit for the Carnegie UK Trust Democracy and Civil Society programme

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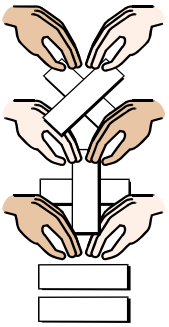

Democratic Audit Literature Review for
Carnegie Trust UK

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Preface

This paper was originally commissioned by the Carnegie UK Trust to inform its new Democracy and Civil Society Programme. The programme has been set up to contribute towards the strengthening of civil society and people empowerment across the UK and Ireland. The Trust has established a Commission of Inquiry into the future of civil society, chaired by Geoff Mulgan, and this has just completed its first phase of investigation. The Trust will be publishing its initial findings later this autumn. For further information on the work of the Carnegie Commission see www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk

In addition to the work of the commission, Carnegie has contracted a number of independent think tanks to map and analyse power in the UK and Ireland, of which this paper is one. Our aim is to move beyond the work of the Rowntree Trusts' Power Inquiry, which largely focused upon the interface between the citizen and the local and national state. Carnegie's power mapping exercise is intended to examine wider political, economic, cultural, social and media influences in society and ways in which civil society can affect and democratise the distribution of power.

This paper does not necessarily represent the views of Carnegie UK. Indeed, we see this very much as work in progress and are keen to receive feedback on its findings to date, not least any gaps. Comments can be fed back to Democratic Audit or directly to Carnegie UK's Democracy Programme Director, Raji Hunjan at raji@carnegieuk.org

Charlie McConnell
Chief Executive, Carnegie UK

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Acknowledgements

We are very pleased to be able to publish this report on power and participation in Britain with a generous grant from the Lipman-Miliband Trust. The research for this literature review was carried out in the summer of 2007. We had only three months in which to carry out the research and so there are gaps in what we have been able to cover; and the research has been becoming increasingly out of date. Nevertheless we believe that we have identified issues that are of great importance to the Brown government's governance package, and especially to its welcome emphasis on participation, and so we decided that we should publish it, warts and all, if at all possible. Our thanks go to the trustees of the Lipman-Miliband Trust for rescuing the report.

We also owe thanks to all those who gave us advice and information last summer. We owe particular thanks to Professors Keith Dowding and Patrick Dunleavy, both of the LSE, and John Gaventa, Fellow at the Institute for Development Studies, University of Sussex, who gave us early steers on the theoretical literature of power; to Jane Foot, independent policy consultant and associate, Centre for Urban & Community Research, Goldsmiths College, University of London, for a personal seminar on local government in Britain; to her and Professor Peter John, of the Institute for Political and Economic Governance, University of Manchester, for advice on drafted sections; and to Professor Marian Barnes, of the School of Applied Social Science, University of Brighton, who shared with us the fruits of her researches into participation. Thanks too to Professor Keith Ewing, of King's College, London, for sharing with us ideas on workplace rights; to Hilary Wainwright, co-editor of *Red Pepper* and research director of the New Politics Project of the Transnational Institute, Amsterdam, for her thoughts on participation; and to Martin McIvor, of UNISON, for valuable insights into modern trade unionism.

We are also grateful for valuable contributions to the study from those who attended a seminar to discuss power and participation at 1 Parliament Street, London SW1: Anthony Barnett, openDemocracy; Tufyal Choudhury, University of Durham; Jane Foot; Sofia Hamaz, Linacre College, University of Oxford; Peter John; Stephen Pittam, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust; and Lord Smith of Clifton.

Raji Hunjan, who was in charge of the democracy project at Carnegie UK Trust, was unfailingly enthusiastic and supportive. We owe thanks too to Charlie McConnell, director, and Morven Masterton at Carnegie.

Stuart Weir, Andrew Blick, David Beetham and *Helen Margetts*
5 February 2008

About the authors

Professor **David Beetham** is a leading British political theorist and Associate Director of Democratic Audit. He has undertaken many recent international consultancies on democracy for UNESCO, the UN High Commission on Human Rights, International IDEA and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Recent publications include *Democracy and Human Rights*, *Democracy, a Beginner's Guide* and *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-first Century: a Guide to Good Practice*, IPU 2006; and (jointly) *International IDEA Handbook on Democracy Assessment* and *Democracy under Blair.* He acted as adviser on the ESRC programme on participation.

Andrew Blick is currently full-time Research Officer at Democratic Audit. He has conducted political research for Lord Radice, Professor George Jones and BBC Television. He was Secretary to an All-Party Group of MPs on the Constitution for two years. He is author of *People who Live in the Dark* (on political advisers) and *How to go to War* and has contributed to a number of Democratic Audit books and reports.

Helen Margetts is Professor of Society and the Internet at Oxford University and was formerly Professor in Political Science, UCL, and Director of the School of Public Policy, UCL. She carries out research and writes on electoral systems and results, popular

attitudes to democratic issues, e-government and participation on the Internet. She is a consultant to the National Audit Office and was co-leader of the team that wrote the influential NAO study, *Government on the Web*. She also led on the study, *The BNP: the roots of its appeal*, for the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.

Professor **Stuart Weir** is Director of Democratic Audit, a research body attached to the Human Rights Centre, University of Essex. He is joint author of three democratic audits of the UK, including *Democracy under Blair* and of other Audit books and reports. He was one of the authors of the *International IDEA Handbook on Democracy Assessment* and has acted as a consultant on democracy and human rights in India, Macedonia, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Palestine and Zimbabwe. He is a former journalist and as editor of the *New Statesman* he founded Charter 88, the movement for democratic reform, in 1988.

Introduction

Political power is important, because it constitutes the very fabric of politics, and of society itself, and determines how the benefits, opportunities and disadvantages of life in the United Kingdom are shared between its inhabitants and communities. Yet the study of power in the UK is, as the sociologist Anthony Giddens wrote 30 years ago, 'almost uncharted territory'. This paper is an initial exploration of this 'uncharted territory'. There is still scarcely any empirical research on power in the United Kingdom, the literature on participation is sparse, and this paper represents the first attempt we know of that seeks to consider both power and participation together. For Democratic Audit, a deeper understanding of the structures of power – institutional and in society at large – is vital to assessing the prospects of the meaningful participation promised in July 2007 by Gordon Brown in the government green paper, *The Governance of Britain*.

The paper is driven by the desire to identify the obstacles and opportunities for participation by ordinary citizens and their communities, and especially the most marginal groups among them, in the decisions that affect their lives. Our purpose is to create a wider understanding of how power works in the UK to enable the deeper expansion of political activity and participation in the UK, and particularly to enable people to take full advantage of the government's drive to open up participation at local level.

The paper has its origins in a literature review, undertaken on behalf of the Carnegie UK Trust, to inform its longer-term project to map power in the UK. It is necessarily indicative: the research was carried out within a very short time-span and there are inevitably omissions. While the review broadly covers the United Kingdom as a whole, much of the detailed research, especially on local governance, centres on England and Wales and we barely cover the impact of devolution. Further, most of the research was conducted before Gordon Brown became Prime Minister and we have been able only to modify the study to take account of what are potentially far-reaching changes in many areas. We hope to publish detailed appraisals of their effect later this year.

Thus we do not present the paper as a full-scale survey of power in all its manifestations in Britain. That must await the further researches of the Carnegie Trust, whose director explains the trust's larger projects on power and civil society in the UK in his preface above. Democratic Audit is engaged in case studies in local government and participation that will complement this research and hopefully add to our knowledge of neglected issues that are vital for a

better understanding of democracy in this country.

In Part 1, we review the theoretic literature analysing power: we consider the five resources that are important for the exercise of power; the different dimensions or 'faces' of power; the supra-national, national and sub-national levels of power; and a typology of 'spaces for participation' against which to weigh up the quality of participation in the UK. We go on to describe the significance of the ideological environment which influences and shapes the use of power. Our interpretation of the theory informs Part 2, which deals with political power and participation in practice, largely up to the end of the Blair premiership (though with additional analysis of the Prime Minister's *The Governance of Britain* green paper). We consider the role of power at global, national, regional and local levels; we also briefly describe the exercise of power in the workplace. In Part 3, we identify 'handles' on power that citizens can make use of and the opportunities for and obstacles to participation; we examine the rights and remedies that are available to people, consider the roles of organisations in civil society (including particularly trade unions and political parties) and assess the impact that the Internet might have. In Part 4, we analyse inequalities in power, resources and participation and a variety of examples of citizen action since 1997 and conclude with some observations on 'citizen action'. In Part 5, we offer some wider conclusions and recommendations.

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Stuart Weir,
Director, Democratic Audit
February 2008

Executive summary

Political power is important, because it constitutes the very fabric of politics, and of society itself, and determines how the benefits and opportunities of life in the United Kingdom are shared between its inhabitants and communities. Remarkably, however, empirical study of power in the UK is, as the sociologist Anthony Giddens wrote 30 years ago, 'almost uncharted territory'. There is however an extensive theoretical literature that analyses (among other matters) the five resources that are important for the exercise of power; the different dimensions or 'faces' of power; and its supra-national, national and local levels. We press theory into service to analyse the distribution of power in the UK and to review the opportunities for participation – especially at local level – at a time when it has become a central feature of the new Labour government's policy-making.

In the modern world no nation is an island entire unto itself. The United Kingdom's freedom of action is shaped by the pressures of the global market, the global communications revolution, its membership of the European Union and an ad-hoc regime of global institutions and alliances in which UK governments play a significant role. Ideas are also powerful. The free-market ideology that dominates world trade and politics has a profound effect on the economic and social policies of British governments that in turn affect the ability of ordinary citizens to govern their affairs. Free-market pressures are re-shaping public services as much as the ordinary public who are being offered participation and 'choice'.

Within the UK, the core executive, or government, wields great and often unaccountable power. This power is sealed in most circumstances by the governing party's majority in the House of Commons – an institution that also acts as bulwark against popular opinion. The City of London and corporate business exercise wide and continuing influence upon government, in part because of the global ideological environment; regulation of the City and corporate affairs is kept 'light'. Government departments routinely consult business interests more thoroughly than other stakeholders. The media also exert influence upon government policies and the print media, in particular the Murdoch newspapers, clearly exercise political power – for example, on the Blair government's policies towards the EU.

Participation by citizens and communities in the UK is as unequal as is the distribution of power and resources in what is an increasingly unequal society. Rich and highly educated social groups tend to dominate associational life, or civil society, and benefit disproportionately from the influence that their organised activities can bring to bear (for example, on planning issues) as well as from the networks that these activities generate. Social exclusion in all its manifestations inhibits the participation of poor and disadvantaged communities and individuals. Moreover, citizen action is not always beneficial in its intentions and effects: the activities of the British National Party and paedophile witch-hunts bear witness to that.

However, participation in the UK is a buoyant and diverse phenomenon that involves a wide range of people. Overall we conclude that widening and deepening participation can lead to greater social justice, more effective public services and a society of self-confident citizens.

Participation is assisted by a variety of 'handles' on power that citizens can make use of – civil and political rights under the Human Rights Act; other rights and regulatory laws; a host of public and unofficial advocacy bodies; regulatory agencies; official mechanisms of redress; and so on. The media can also further popular or community causes through reports and comment. The trade unions, though greatly diminished in their spread and influence since the 1970s, can still provide representation and education for workers and support socially valuable

enterprises (though the workplace can be the site of gross manipulation of power).

The internet has had a far-reaching and growing impact on governmental, corporate and media communications in the UK and has greatly expanded their influence. Its ability to link groups and individuals and to facilitate joint action plainly carries great potential for participation. A key implication of this potential is that non-state actors can become more powerful vis-à-vis the state; state institutions tend to suffer a net loss of nodality in the on-line world. But here again inequalities in society are reflected in access to the internet and prejudice its potential to rebalance power relations and enhance participation.

Local democracy is important for the exercise of power and political participation. Most opportunities for people to play a part in decisions that affect the quality of their lives normally occur at local level; and studies of participation have shown that most people participate at this level. However, modern 'local governance', especially in England, is neither local nor often directly democratic. Local authorities are too large to be close to their populations and too much under central government controls on their policies, finances and resources to be fully responsive to the needs and wishes of those populations. In current governing structures, the significant policy-making is largely carried out at the level of the very largest local authorities (serving populations of up to nearly 1.4 million people); these authorities make policy with other authorities, major quangos, other public bodies and regional government offices in remote, highly complex and fluid policy-making 'partnerships' within which central government and its agencies effectively rule, the local authorities closest to people have negligible voice and accountability is confused.

The Prime Minister's commitment to 'change' in Britain's constitutional arrangements must therefore be far more radical if it is to make a democratic reality of participatory democracy at the local level – where we place most emphasis in this study. Big in local government is neither effective nor beautiful and divorces the local state from local communities. We recommend a fundamental reversal of existing policies towards local government and the quango state so that elected local authorities can be made considerably more autonomous in terms of their policies, revenues and expenditure and protected against constant central government meddling.

Hazel Blears, the government minister responsible for local government, cites participatory budgeting in the Brazilian city of Porte Alegre as a precedent for similar budgeting exercises here. But the contrast between the position of Britain's weak and remote local authorities and Porto Alegre is striking. A World Bank Social Development Note states that municipalities in Brazil have 'considerable autonomy over their revenues (raised from local taxes, tariffs and federal transfers) and expenditures' – and it is this autonomy that makes participatory budgeting there meaningful. The budgeting process in Porto Alegre decides major regional decisions on transportation; education, leisure and culture; health and social welfare; economic development and taxation; and city organisation, as well as neighbourhood decisions; under Hazel Blears, only marginal 'left over' funds will be made available for citizens' decisions for minor projects.

Our recommendations are as follows:

1. The government must ground consultation, participation, and devices of 'direct' democracy such as citizen's juries and participatory budgeting within the framework of elected representative government at local and regional level.

2. The government must lift the weight of central financial and policy controls from local authorities to give them freedoms to make policy, and sufficient resources and local tax-raising capacity to be able to respond to the wishes and needs of their local populations, as expressed through the ballot, consultative exercises, participatory budgeting, citizens' juries and other participatory devices.

3. The Prime Minister's proposal for a concordat between central government and the Local Government Association places far more responsibility upon local authorities to satisfy central government than for central government to give formal recognition to the significance of local autonomy. We recommend that as part of its moves towards a written constitution the government should give local government constitutional protection on the European model and create strong and self confident local authorities according to the criteria of the European Charter for Local Self Government.

4. We also recommend that the government should dismantle the undemocratic scaffolding of English 'partnership governance' where major

decisions are to be taken at near regional level out of reach of popular participation. 'Partnership governance' shares power between various 'partners' – quangos, trusts, police authorities, partnerships, etc – rather than with the people or their elected representatives. These partners – charged with shaping local policies and decision-making – are only partially or not at all accessible, transparent or accountable individually.

5. Tony Blair once promised a 'bonfire' of quangos. This promise was never a realistic proposition. But the major quangos and NHS bodies with executive functions that now exist do require to be democratised.

6. The government's legislative programme for the current session of Parliament includes the Planning Bill that would create a new quango, the infrastructure planning commission, to decide upon major infrastructure plans for airports, ports, motorways, power stations, reservoirs, waste incinerators. We urge Gordon Brown not to proceed with this proposal in the light of his commitment to greater participation. The very point of these proposals is to ease the way for the kind of developments that provoke citizen action by removing decisions further from ordinary citizens and their elected representatives.

7. The role of central government in encouraging greater citizen engagement should be simply to set a basic framework of principles, consistency and transparency rather than determining the exact form that such exercises should take. The framework should establish rules that ensure that people are enabled to participate in decision-making, rather than merely being consulted; that final decisions should take account of their recommendations; and that participation should be inclusive and extend to all those who are likely to be affected by a policy or decision – in order to avoid the danger that opportunities for greater participation will be seized upon most by articulate and already organised social groups at the expense of other groups.

8. Finally, the Prime Minister should reconsider the outright refusal to consider including economic, social and cultural rights in the new Bill of Rights and Responsibilities that is trailed in the green paper. The introduction of such rights in the UK would balance and make more substantial the civil and political rights that people have under the Human Rights Act and common law and strengthen the ability of disadvantaged groups and communities to participate in the social, economic and environmental policies that shape their lives and livelihoods.

Part 1 Theories of political power

On 1 May 2007, the people of Modbury, a 'horsy farmy' town in Devon, adopted a ban on plastic bags after winning over local tradespeople. They were inspired by a local camerawoman, Rebecca Hoskins, who brought back film of the dangers for wild-life caused by plastic bag pollution in the Pacific and English seas. Within two weeks, more than 60 towns, or rather towns-people, in the UK approached Modbury to learn how it was done and a plastic-bag-free movement has been born that is now having a national impact.

Retired solicitor Ben Birnberg used Company Act rules to force Tesco to accept a resolution at its annual shareholders' meeting in June 2007, committing the firm to adopt higher standards in its dealings with suppliers and farmers in developing countries after a War on Want report found evidence of Bangladeshi women being paid poverty wages in 'death trap' factories. To applause from the floor, Gertruida Baartman a South African fruit picker whose farm supplies Tesco through exporter Capespan, said she had come for a second time to speak up 'because little has changed in our lives. Our children still go hungry ... We are asking Tesco to give us what we deserve. We just want to live a life of dignity.'

In October 2006 Bill Rammell, the higher education minister, announced that the existing universal entitlement to free English (ESOL) classes for people with different languages was to be removed. These classes are a significant life line for thousands of people with poor English, and especially for marginalised ethnic minorities. The classes contribute to easing them more fully into society and strengthen their communities overall. A coalition of ESOL students, MPs, trade unions and teachers began an internet-based campaign of meetings, marches, lobbying and media coverage and finally in March Rammell announced that he was modifying the decision. Hundreds of people in Lewes boycotted the Lewes Arms after Greene King, the owners, had withdrawn the local Harvey's Bitter from sale to force customers to drink their own IPA, even after receiving a petition signed by 1,100 people; after a huge 90 per cent fall in takings and international press coverage, Greene King threw in the towel just as *Der Spiegel* was interviewing local protesters. In May 2007 a jury in Bristol unanimously found two carpenters, Toby Olditch and Philip Pritchard, not guilty of criminal damage for breaking into RAF Fairford to sabotage US B52 bombers in an effort to save the lives of Iraqi civilians on the eve of the 'shock and awe' bombing raids over Iraq.

All these events are recent examples of citizens acting or joining together in collective action at local and national level

to change or affect decisions or policies that they believe are wrong. They have been chosen at random to illustrate the diversity and spontaneity of citizen action in the UK, but they also show how individual actions often become collective and inform the public at large – for example a 'Fairford Two' campaign sprang up around Olditch and Pritchard – and how the very local and supra-national are often inter-related. They also give some sense of the complexity as well as the importance of political power in the world and within British society. Political power is important at all levels and in all its varieties; beginning with the place of the UK within a globalised world driven by ideas as well as by financial markets and trade, major nations, international institutions and corporations; and narrowing down to government at all levels in Britain, but especially at local level given the importance of local democracy to participation.

Political power, in brief, constitutes the very fabric of politics, and of society itself, and determine how the benefits, opportunities and disadvantages of life in the United Kingdom are shared between its inhabitants and communities, and which social groups participate in public decision-making and which don't. Participation in the UK is as unequal as is the distribution of power and resources. Participatory practices may for example privilege middle-class home-owners at the expense of poorer neighbours in housing need when proposals for development are being considered. Moreover, citizen action is not always beneficial in its intentions and effects: the activities of the British National Party and paedophile witch-hunts bear witness to that. However, it is our belief that widening and deepening participation can lead to greater social justice, more effective public services and a society of self-confident citizens.

The Nature of Political Power

We have selected the work of four contributors to the theoretical literature as guides for our review of power because it seems to us that their writings have most relevance to our interest in the way political power actually works in the UK and the place that participation can and does inhabit. Most basically, *Keith Dowding*'s book *Power* identifies the different kinds of resource through which people are able to get others to do what they want.[1] His resource-based account of power in which actors are powerful because of the resources they bring to a bargain with other actors is probably the most useful starting point. *David Beetham* draws attention to a further aspect of power: the way its acceptability and effectiveness depend upon its degree of legitimacy.[2] Drawing on them both, we can identify five resources that are important in determining an actor's power:

- **Unconditional incentives**
  i.e., an actor's ability to structure the choices others make. The incentives are unconditional in the sense that the second actor bears the costs or receives the advantages no matter what they do.
- **Conditional incentives**
  i.e., an actor's capacity to affect people's choices through offers or threats, or 'throffers'.
- **Legitimate authority**
  e.g., the ability of an actor, such as the state, to make and enforce laws
- **Information/expertise**
  i.e., knowledge and information are important power resources. The ability to withhold, discover, publish or disseminate information can be crucial.
- **Reputation**
  i.e, a wide-ranging resource, including for example, celebrity approval or drive (Geldof and Bono; Jamie Oliver; etc), a pressure group's reputation for sound research (Child Poverty Action Group) or for 'making waves' (Greenpeace), or the mafia's reputation for relentless pursuit of its threats and interests.

In the context of public policy, *Steven Lukes*'s classic *Power, a Radical View* distinguishes three different dimensions or 'faces' of power: the public face, the hidden face, and an 'insidious' third face. These dimensions are: the ability to get one's way despite opposition or resistance; the ability to keep issues off the political agenda in the first place; and finally, the shaping of the public domain through the beliefs, values and wants that are considered normal or acceptable; [3] or, as John Gaventa explains it, the process

'through which the relatively powerless come to internalise and accept their own condition, and thus might not be aware of nor act upon their interests in any observable way.'[4]

Finally, *John Gaventa* extends Lukes's multi-dimensional approach to power in the public domain by adding, first, different

1 Dowding, K., *Power*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996

2 Beetham, D., *The Legitimation of Power*, Macmillan 1991.

3 Now available in a Second Edition, Palgrave/ Macmillan, 2005.

4 Gaventa, J., 'Levels, Spaces and Forms of Power: Analysing opportunities for change' in Berenskoeeter and Williams, eds., *Power in World Politics*, Routledge, 2007.

spatial levels (supra-national, national, sub-national), and, secondly, setting out a typology of 'spaces for participation' (invited, closed, claimed or created) which we consider throughout and use to frame our final analysis.

Key features of political power

From these – and other[5] – theoretical studies we have drawn a few simple propositions about the nature of power – what it is and what its key features are – which have helped organise and guide our review of the research literature.

1. At its most basic, power is the ability people have to achieve their purposes, whatever these purposes happen to be. The extent of their power depends on a combination of their capacities, resources and opportunities. Power as so defined is unequally distributed within British society – some people and some groups have greater power than others. The inequalities in political and social power are not random but are structured by capital, class, gender, ethnicity, age, and so on. We should begin by paying attention to this differential structuring of capacities, resources and opportunities. Processes of exclusion, typically embodied in rules, which prohibit access to key resources, and which determine who may use or possess them, are central to the social organisation of power. Rules of property are the most obvious example of these rules. But social attitudes and socially necessary skills and activities also become a source of power through rules of exclusion and access, leading for example to discriminatory practices on the one hand and differentials in education and qualifications on the other.

2. Power is also relational, that is, it is structured and exercised in relations between people in a variety of ways. People's capacity to achieve their purposes can be realised *through* others, by influence or persuasion; it can be realised *over* others, by the power to grant or withhold some resource or service that they need, or by virtue of a position of authority; it can be realised *with* others, through cooperation and organisation in a common enterprise or activity. And of course all three modes – through, over and with – can occur simultaneously, and in both private and public contexts.

3. The ability to form groups is crucial to the acquisition of power: political and social power always depends upon a coalition of interests. It is typical of the relatively powerless in the basic sense (those low in personal capacities, resources and opportunities) that they particularly need to cooperate with others to achieve their purposes; but they are also particularly vulnerable to 'collective action problems' – the disincentives and obstacles to forming a coalition. [6] The unemployed are a classic example of a so called 'latent' pressure group, that is large but geographically dispersed, heterogeneous and short of any of the 'power resources' described above.

4. In modern societies relational power is structured and concentrated in institutional systems of authority in the economy and state (defined broadly), and in the shifting patterns of relationship between them. One characteristic of the present phase is that of economic and voluntary enterprises taking over public functions previously carried out by elected authorities. However, two features are common to all institutions and corporate bodies in a democracy, whether operating in the private or public sectors:

   i) They have to meet certain publicly validated criteria of legitimacy, both for the way they are organised (accountability, etc.) and for what they do (satisfying needs, not causing harm, etc.). While these criteria for legitimacy both reinforce and set limits to institutional power, public challenges to them can form some of the most serious challenges to that power.

   ii) In a democracy these institutional systems of authority also have to provide space for the voices of different groups of stakeholders, whether as citizens, consumers, shareholders or whatever, including opportunities for individual complaint or redress. Though these spaces are enormously varied in form and extent (see Gaventa here), they are typically controlled from above.[7]

5. A simple further aspect of 'power' is one that long predates

5 Arendt, H., *On Violence*, Allen Lane 1970; Bachrach, P., and Baratz, M. S., *Power and Poverty: Theory and Practice*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1970; Baldwin, D. A., *Paradoxes of Power*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989; Dahl, R., *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1961; Foucault, M., *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, vol. 3, Penguin 1994; Gramsci, A., *Prison Notebooks: Selections*, Lawrence & Wishart 1987; Giddens, A., and Held, D. (eds), *Classes, Power, and Conflict: Classical and Contemporary Debates*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1982; and Stanworth, P., and Giddens, A. (eds), *Elites and power in British society*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1974.

6 See Dowding, op cit.

7 For a broad summary, see Weir, S., and Beetham, D., *Political Power and Democratic Control*, Routledge 1999, esp. ch. 10; and more specifically, Barnes, M., Newman, J., and Sullivan, H., *Power, Participation and Political Renewal: case studies in public participation*, The Policy Press, Bristol, 2007

the work of Steven Lukes: that is, the famous 'law of anticipated reactions', which draws out the logic of power as an ability or capacity. Suppose you have the capacity to jump over a three-foot wall. You don't have to be continually exercising the capacity by jumping over walls to have it; it remains still there. Similarly with power: people adjust their behaviour in the context of the powerful because of their anticipations of how they may react if they don't, without power having to be exercised or even made explicit. This logic is what explains the 'invisible face' of power.

6. In contrast, the power of the relatively powerless has typically to be *visibly* exercised, sometimes in apparently confrontational or disruptive ways, if it is to achieve any effect. 'Participation' refers to the visible exercise of a latent capacity in collaboration with others, which is only effective through its public manifestation.

7. Power is not an unchanging or finite resource, but is a fluid entity that has differing effects and impact in different circumstances and between actors, depending often on whether actors are in agreement or opposition. A powerful authority may accept a proposal or demand from others if it is in the authority's interests, or reject it when it is not.

8. Power in all the modes outlined above is affected by the prevailing ideas and beliefs of the relevant agents – from beliefs about their respective powers, to the wider ideas, ideologies, 'common sense of the age' etc., which structure what is thought possible and desirable. As Keynes noted, '[The] ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else'. [8] Lukes' 'non-decisions' – determining what is on and *off* the political agenda – are not necessarily the result of people working intentionally to prevent the consideration of certain courses of action (though of course that happens), but are often the product of deeply engrained mind-sets. Naturally, the power to shape or influence ideas is one of the most significant powers there is, though tracing the precise nature and course of such influence is rarely easy.

6. In this paper we build on Gaventa's typology of 'closed, invited and claimed spaces' to cover the following issues:

   a. Who participates and why (some combination of incentives, opportunities and resources)

   b. The distinctive mode of participation; a useful typology would distinguish between the following:

   - individual vs. collective action or initiative;
   - unstructured vs. structured through existing organisations or channels
   - time-bound or one-off vs. ongoing through time
   - reactive vs. proactive

   c. An assessment of the impact of participation, and an explanation for this (or lack of it).

The ideological framework

We can pursue Keynes's comment about the power of prevailing ideas and beliefs briefly in relation to the way they shape public policy and opportunities for participation. Historically, the exceptional circumstances of the second world war made space for an ideological and social upheaval that temporarily broke the political and social structures of the 1930s and created a relatively long-lasting new era of social consensus around the welfare state. Wartime ministers were obliged to appease a growing mood of popular radicalism. A new consensus grew around the ideas of Keynes and William Beveridge and their advocacy of interventionist state initiative (vital anyway in a time of total war) and egalitarian state action.[9] In the late 1960s and 1970s, disillusion with Britain's relatively slow growth and loss of reputation in the world created another opportunity for radical re-thinking: Mrs Thatcher's neo-liberal revolution, opening up the British economy to the world and crushing the trade unions which were widely blamed for the 'British sickness'. The fall of the Soviet empire, removing the only 'actually existing' alternative to capitalism, has now given aggressive neo-liberalism space to establish itself as the governing doctrine of globalisation.

The impact of this major shift in the ideological framework for government, or rather 'governance', on the less privileged with whom we are concerned, can be heightened

8 Keynes, J. M., *The General Theory of Employment, Money and Interest*, Macmillan 1936.

9 See for example Addison, P., *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War*, Pimlico, 1994; and Hennessy, P., *Never Again: Britain 1945*, Jonathan Cape 1992.

by institutional arrangements. Political scientist Peter Taylor-Gooby argues that the 'highly centralised' nature of the system of government in the UK gives those who hold power 'a freer hand' to direct welfare reform than anywhere else in Europe. People from more 'marginal groups (for example unemployed people and those on low incomes) find it impossible to make their voices heard.' Taylor-Gooby states that the traditional Keynes-Beveridge citizenship welfare state no longer has 'powerful advocates'. Political arrangements in the UK 'facilitate the stability of this [liberal] consensus, because first-past-the-post voting makes it difficult for minority parties to exert an influence and because unions are too weak to contribute to policy-making.' While those people who are most harmed by the 'liberal-leaning consensus' remain unheard and unable to enter political debate, 'high levels of poverty and inequality…are likely to persist.'[10]

Ideas of all shapes and sizes however also have power below and among these major discourses and can influence their course. The United Nations established human rights as a global objective after 1945 and regional human rights instruments, such as the European Convention of Human Rights, were agreed. Social movements such as feminism and 'gay rights' have a continuing influence, especially in the North. Environmentalism has been given a major impetus globally, nationally and locally, by the now undeniable long-term consequences of global warming. Given our concern for social justice, it is important to note that the post-war ideology of the 'welfare state' is not fully dissipated among the British public. A majority of people in Britain believe that 'social justice' is one of the foundations of democracy, along with political freedom, both of which ideas are important for participation; and opinion polls generally record popular support for state welfare and its institutions (pre-eminently, the principle of a NHS free at the point of need). [11]

10 Taylor-Gooby, P., 'Welfare Reform in the UK: the Construction of a Liberal Consensus', in Taylor-Gooby, P. (ed.), *Welfare States Under Pressure*, Sage 2001.

11 See for example, Dunleavy et al, *Voices of the People: Popular attitudes to democratic renewal in Britain*, Politico's (second edition) 2001; and Hutton et al, *New Life for Health*, Vintage, 2000.

Part 2 Power and participation in practice

In Part 2 we consider the role of government and the exercise of power at global, national, regional and local levels and discuss corporate influence on government in Britain and the role of the media. We consider the contested role of local government in some detail. We also briefly describe the exercise of power in the workplace. Part 2 deals with political power largely up to the end of the Blair premiership (though with some preliminary analysis of the Prime Minister's *The Governance of Britain* green paper [1]).

National government and globalisation

Most British citizens broadly look to their representatives in Parliament to guide the government in running the nation in their interests; and lower down the scale look to the members of devolved assemblies or local authorities to do the same for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and London and their localities. [2] But as they are aware, the reality is a great deal more complex. Nowadays no nation is 'an island entire of itself' in a globalised world; and the powers of both devolved and local administrations are circumscribed to varying degrees by that of the centre.

Power at a global level

Power in the UK has to be assessed within a global perspective, not least because the global inter-dependence of nations in world society is markedly on the increase and Britain's politicians often justify their policies and actions as the consequence of 'globalisation'. Globalisation is generally presented solely as an economic phenomenon, but as Anthony Giddens, in his guise as a New Labour adviser, points out, the world has also become 'interconnected electronically' in far more radical and far-reaching ways since the first effective satellite system made instantaneous communication possible from any one point in the world to another and created 24-hour money markets. [3] Further, as a recent study of UK foreign policy observed,

'There is a complex interaction between international and domestic affairs – we live in a global marketplace, we feel the growing effects of global warming, we experience global migration, we combat international crime and drug-trading, we fear international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, we share liability to HIV/AIDS and other diseases.'[4]

1 Ministry of Justice, *The Governance of Britain*, Cm. 7170, TSO July 2007.

2 Our review of power is necessarily de-limited. Its scope is confined to the UK and dominant English aspects of power and participation and so we cannot give attention to the often significant differences of arrangements and relationships in London, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

3 Giddens, A., *Over to You, Mr Brown*, Polity Press, 2007.

4 Burall et al, *Not in Our Name: Democracy and Foreign Policy in the UK*, Politico's 2006.

Take for example the power of organisations like the World Trade Organisation (WTO), both legal and ideological, to shape decisions that affect British citizens, even at local level, while as Shirley Williams complained in the House of Lords,' we [peers and MPs] are virtually voiceless in them.'[5] The WTO is the international organisation responsible for negotiating, establishing and enforcing the rules that govern trade between nations. In 1995, the WTO concluded the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) that extended multilateral trading to services, or 'liberalised' public services. [6] GATS, though largely uncredited, lends largely unseen global force to the continuing privatisation and 'out-sourcing' policies in UK public services and opens the door to national and multinational corporate takeovers throughout the public sector. In 2002, the public sector trade union UNISON was involved in a major struggle to protect public services from privatisation in Newcastle (see also p.41) and sent Kenny Bell, the branch secretary, to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre the better to understand the global legal and ideological context of their campaign. As Hilary Wainwright, editor of *Red Pepper*, recounts, Bell returned home 'with a pressing sense of the global agenda being driven through by the WTO . . . [he] was stunned by the similarity between the experiences of other nations and Newcastle's:

'Whether you are talking about electricity cut-off in South Africa, privatisation of water in Columbia, the threat to public transport in India or the break up of local government services in Britain, there's a global free-trade agenda behind it.'

Bell brought back from Brazil a twenty-foot banner announcing 'Globalismo lutte, globalismo esperance' –'Globalise struggle, globalise hope' that soon covered a wall of the UNISON office in Newcastle Town Hall, complementing a homegrown 'Our City is Not for Sale' banner.[7]

So what of the UK's interdependence in terms of power? In the very first instance, the United Kingdom is a member of the European Union and shares sovereignty with the 26 other member states. The Council of Ministers (among whom British ministers participate) makes shared decisions for the UK, European Commissioners pursue European policies here and in the wider world, the UK Parliament shares its responsibilities with the European Parliament, the European Court of Justice enforces British compliance with EU law. The EU frames trading arrangements for all member states, undertakes international trade negotiations within the World Trade Organisation and dispenses much of the UK's development aid. It is estimated that 85 per cent of Britain's domestic legislation emanates from the EU and the Union's growing security and anti-crime agenda is increasingly influential in the UK, not least in access to personal data. [8] Given the significance of the EU, a host of lobbying private and public organisations, many UK-based, cluster around the decision-making hub in Brussels.

The political and economic autonomy of the UK and EU is conditioned by the political and economic power of the United States, and that of other major states, such as China, Russia and India. Finally major multilateral companies, UK-based and otherwise, exercise influence on and within the UK. [9]

There is considerable dispute about the implications of globalisation for the exercise of power within the United Kingdom. Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson describe a dominant theory (which they contest) that argues that global processes are 'dissolving . . . national cultures, national economies and national borders':

'A truly global economy is claimed to have emerged or to be in the process of emerging, in which distinct national economies and, therefore, domestic strategies of national economic management are increasingly irrelevant.' [10]

Contemporary historians have argued that traumatic events in post-war Britain – in particular, the devaluation of sterling in 1967, the IMF crisis of 1976 and Britain's ignominious exit from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism on 'Black Wednesday' in 1992 – demonstrate the impotence of government in the face of irresistible global trends (rather than poor management of a weak currency). In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet system there was a triumphant portrayal of democracy and economic liberalism combining forces as a compelling global process. Francis Fukuyama wrote in 1992 that

'From Latin America to Eastern Europe, from the Soviet Union to the Middle East and Asia, strong governments have been failing over the last two decades. And while they have not given

5 Baroness (Shirley) Williams, speech in House of Lords, HL Debates, 18 July 2001 vol.626, col. 1481

6 See www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/serv_e/gatsintre_e.htm

7 Wainwright, H., *Reclaim the State: Experiments in Popular Democracy*, Verso 2003 (second edition Seagull and Berg, forthcoming 2008).

8 See further Lord, C., *A Democratic Audit of the European Union*, Palgrave, 2004; Burall, S., Donnelly, D., and Weir, S., *Not in Our Name: Democracy and Foreign Policy in the UK*, Politico's 2006; www.statewatch.org

9 For an overview, see Held, D., and McGrew, A., (eds), *The Global Transformation Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate*, Polity Press, Cambridge; on the power of global corporations, see the Institute for Policy Studies at www.ips-dc.org/

10 Hirst, P. and Thompson, G., *Globalization in Question* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1996), p.1.

way in all cases to stable liberal democracies, liberal democracy remains the only coherent political aspiration that spans different regions and cultures around the globe. In addition, liberal principles in economics – the "free market" – have spread, and have succeeded in producing the unprecedented levels of material prosperity, both in industrially developed countries and in countries that had been, at the close of World War II, part of the impoverished Third World. A liberal revolution in economic thinking has sometimes preceded, sometimes followed, the move towards political freedom around the globe.' [11]

Such arguments matter for social justice, public services and participation in the UK. The idea of the 'liberal revolution in economic thinking' is used to make an influential case against state intervention, on the grounds that it will either fail or undermine a state's competitiveness, thus harming the living standards of the population. In the UK, this idea has been very influential in justifying the business-friendly policies of both Conservative and Labour governments and their pursuit of a low-wage flexible economy; New Labour's 1997 manifesto stated, 'New Labour believes in a flexible labour market that serves employers and employees alike'. [12]

But though globalisation is the dominant force, or set of forces, shaping national societies today, others (among them Hirst and Thompson) argue that 'globalization, as conceived by the more extreme globalizers, is largely a myth'. They state that genuinely transnational companies are 'relatively rare' and that capital mobility is not producing the massive shifts of investment from advanced to developing economies that have prompted the Thatcher and Labour governments to adopt their low-wage and open market policies. They conclude that while 'classical *national* economic management now has limited scope' there remain possibilities for 'governance' – meaning 'regulation and control' of 'economic relations at both international and national levels'.[13]

On similar lines, Stephen Krasner has argued in *Sovereignty: Organised Hypocrisy* that 'Rulers have always operated in a transnational environment; autarky has rarely been an option; regulation and monitoring of transborder flows have always been problematic.' While not claiming that present trends have had 'no impact on state control', Krasner notes that the level of spending for major countries has on average increased substantially since 1950 alongside rising trade and capital flows. Rates of corporate tax have not as a rule hindered investment; investment in infrastructure such as education, transport and telecommunications can encourage corporate investment, not discourage it; and the provision of social safety nets has made the impact of globalisation more politically acceptable. [14]

Britain's role in the world

Britain is one of the affluent nations that dominate the large and growing number of intergovernmental and international bodies which exercise global power and through which power may be exercised or mediated. Britain participates in all the most central of these bodies, including the UN Security Council and General Assembly, the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, WHO (World Health Organisation), etc., as well as many lesser bodies. Britain is a leading player in the Atlantic alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) which involves military responsibilities; a member state of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which involves a commitment to act against corruption in trade; a member of the Council of Europe and a signatory of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which renders the UK subject to the jurisdiction of the European Court on Human Rights.

As we have noted above, parliamentarians like Baroness Williams have complained about their lack of influence over government policies in these major global institutions. Foreign policy as a whole is in effect a huge 'closed space' in Gaventa's terms. [15] British governments have very flexible, because undefined, powers of action to make and pursue foreign policy and even to declare and make war without the need for formal Parliamentary approval. These powers are the extensive 'royal prerogative' powers, inherited by government ministers from the monarchy. [16] The looseness of these powers enabled Tony Blair to direct foreign policy largely personally and to pursue the drive to war against Iraq through a small group of ministers and officials in virtual seclusion from the cabinet.[17] In

11 Fukuyama, F., *The End of History and the Last Man* (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1992), xiii-xiv.

12 Labour Party, *New Labour: Because Britain Deserves Better*, Labour Party 1997.

13 Hirst, P. and Thompson, G., *Globalization in Question*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1996.

14 Krasner, S., *Sovereignty: Organised Hypocrisy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1999.

15 See Burall, S., Donnelly, D., and Weir, S., *Not in Our Name: Democracy and Foreign Policy in the UK*, Politico's 2006; and also www.independentdiplomat.com

16 Public Administration Select Committee, *Taming the Prerogative: Strengthening Ministerial Accountability to Parliament*, HC 422, TSO 16 March 2004.

17 Butler Review Team, *Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction*, HC 898, TSO 14 July 2004.

his first address as Prime Minister to the House of Commons, Gordon Brown pledged to hand these powers over to Parliament (where a majority party, like his, would still largely dictate their use). Secrecy laws protect from disclosure virtually all information on foreign and defence policy, relations with other nations and security matters. The Foreign Office official, Carne Ross, who was at Britain's UN Mission in New York, told the Foreign Affairs Committee that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, marginalised and 'politicised' since 2001, had been reduced to a subordinate role to Downing Street. Ross also testified that the FCO acted without taking Parliament seriously.[18] Since the FCO usually takes the lead in making and liaising external policies across a broad sweep – with all their implications for everyday life in the UK – Ross's testimony is significant, especially as the FCO is the 'lead' department on European affairs.

Yet the public and their representatives in Parliament increasingly want a say at the supra-national level in decisions over European laws and policies, the UK role in the EU, the Special Relationship with the USA, our development aid and arms trade policies. An opinion poll for a research project on the accountability of Britain's foreign policy, run by Democratic Audit, the Federal Trust and One World Trust, found that a majority of people wanted it to be more humanitarian and equitable.[19] The royal prerogative powers are only part of the problem with regard to the UK's contributions within the major intergovernmental organisations. Britain's representatives in these bodies are usually not ministers, but officials unknown to the public; and the difficulties of asserting public interest in their activities and policies is compounded by the fact that they are opaque and secretive bodies which are entirely unaccountable.[20] Holding international business to account is equally problematic. Organisations such as One World Trust [21] and the Corner House [22] carry out extensive investigations in this area. One World Trust has published a Global Accountability Report, assessing the accountability of a sample of intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), transnational corporations (TNCs) and international NGOs over four relatively undemanding dimensions of transparency, participation, evaluation (i.e. do they evaluate their work?) and complaint and response. Four IGOs – the World Bank, the International Bank for Reconstruction, the Global Environment Facility and OECD achieved modest scores on three categories; none did well on four. Just two out of 10 TNCs, Anglo American and Pzifer, did modestly well on three categories, none did well on four.[23] AccountAbility and CSRnetwork also conduct annual surveys of major world corporations, ranking them on their social responsibility, alongside other work.[24] Transparency International seeks to measure corruption in world trade and has recently had the effect of inspiring the OECD anti-bribery convention and conditionalities in World Bank practice.[25]

Political and Corporate Power

Here we analyse three main sites of power and influence over public policy in the UK – central government, corporate interests and the media – and examine the close links between them. As we have suggested in Part 1, neo-liberal economic ideas in the context of globalisation and the embrace of these ideas by successive Conservative and Labour governments have created a pervasive ideological framework for government and corporate conduct that is inimical to social justice in the UK. Central government in the UK has huge executive and legislative powers at its disposal [26] and the leaderships of both major parties are committed to a close working relationship with the business and financial sectors; the Labour government in power has been at great pains to placate the print media, and especially the tabloid press (see p.28). We begin the analysis in the 'Whitehall village'.

Government at the centre

The United Kingdom has never been a popular democracy: legitimate authority, a key power resource (see p.15), lies in governments that are not directly or even formally responsible to 'the People', but to Parliament.[27] Executive (or government) power in Britain is formally vested in the 'the Crown in Parliament', which is to say in the hands of the Prime Minister and his or her colleagues in Parliament to whom most (but not all) royal powers now belong. While the Queen reigns, she does not rule. Thus the executive and legislative arms of government are fused in Parliament, the highest court in the land. The 'Crown' here

18 Ross, C., oral evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee, 8 November 2006. See further: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmfaff/uc1720-i/uc172001.htm

19 www.myforeignpolicytoo.org

20 Burall et al, op cit.

21 http://www.oneworldtrust.org/

22 http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/

23 Blagescu, M., and Lloyd, R., *2006 Global Accountability Report: Holding power to account*, One World Trust, 2007.

24 http://www.accountability21.net/ ; http://csrnetwork.com/ ; Demos, T., 'Beyond the Bottom Line', *Fortune,* 30 October 2006.

25 http://www.transparency.org/ .

26 Weir and Beetham, op cit.

27 This is a vital distinction because as we explain, Parliament is subordinate to the executive and among other matters it makes the civil service responsible to the government of the day rather than to the public.

stands as a convenient symbol for the executive, or government, a 'collective entity which in law may stand for central government'.[28] In practical terms, we shall talk of the 'core executive', that is, the partnership of ministers, the Whitehall bureaucracy and the agencies of the state that governs the UK.[29]

This distinction is crucial to understanding the nature of the balance of power in British democracy. Public opinion and popular participation are routed through the long-standing structures of Parliament and the leadership of the political party that commands a majority in the House of Commons. But while Parliament remains sovereign in constitutional theory, and in the popular imagination, it has lost power to the core executive within. The notoriously disproportionate nature of plurality-rule (or 'first-past-the-post') general elections has in modern times generally given one or other of the two main parties swollen unearned majorities in the House that confer on them broadly unchallengeable legislative and executive power.[30] Most political scientists agree that government in Britain is 'through Parliament and not by Parliament'; but Parliament often acts as a buffer against popular opinion. For example, in 1968 the late Richard Crossman celebrated the ability of the then Labour government to withstand the surge of popular anti-immigrant feeling – 'the nearest thing to a popular mass movement since the 1930s' – inspired by the 'rivers of blood' speech by the late Enoch Powell. He wrote:

'The British constitution is like a rock against which the wave of popular emotion breaks . . . the leadership is insulated from the masses by the existence of Parliament. Parliament is the buffer . . .'[31]

On this occasion, Parliament's role may reasonably be seen as a protection against demagoguery; but the fact is also that the government and the House can generally ignore and ride out public opinion on a given issue, however weighty and informed public opinion may be (as with the invasion of Iraq). The most significant role of the House of Commons, keeping the executive under scrutiny and demanding accountability, is no longer the responsibility of the whole House acting as an entity, if it ever was, but has largely devolved upon the opposition parties and is thus relegated to the realm of 'party politics' (as well as to select committees which carry out valuable inquiries, but rarely have enough political power to make a difference).

The powers of the executive

The outstanding governing tradition in British politics is the idea of 'strong' government.[32] The political executive is dominant and representative government in the United Kingdom has historically been conceived, and largely works, as a means of legitimising executive power (i.e., legitimate authority).[33] Thus Jack Straw, while Home Secretary, described the United Kingdom as an 'executive democracy'; and Professor Francesca Klug, of the London School of Economics, talked in a recent speech of 'executive sovereignty'. Lord Hailsham famously drew on the role that the electoral system plays in making the executive 'strong' when he described the UK as an 'elective dictatorship'.[34] But executive power is swollen not only by its majority in the House of Commons, but also by the absence of a written constitution setting out clearly in law its responsibilities and limits.[35] Hence, the executive wields strong and flexible powers constrained largely by political calculation; the views primarily of majority party MPs (an influence that is usually indirect but can be direct, as in the rebellion in 2006 that lead to the government defeat over the proposal for up to 90 days detention for terror suspects); media influence; and on occasion, and often importantly, by judicial review in the courts. Quite how far Gordon Brown's 'route map' towards a new constitutional settlement will change matters is far from clear, but the absence of any commitment on electoral reform suggests that the foundations of the power of a majority party in Parliament, at the centre of the core executive, may not be greatly shaken.

The 'core executive' itself, more popularly known as 'the government', that governs Britain and determines domestic, foreign and European affairs, is a complex site of an inter-active and shifting process of decision-making.[36]

The executive's majority

28 Bradley, A. W., and Ewing, K. D., *Constitutional and Administrative Law,* 14th Edition, Pearson Longman, 2007. p. 242.

29 Rhodes, W. A. R., and Dunleavy, P. (eds), *The Prime Minister, Cabinet and Core Executive*, Macmillan 1995.

30 Dunleavy, P., Margetts, H., and Weir, S., *The Other National Lottery*, Democratic Audit 7, Human Rights Centre, University of Essex, 1996.

31 Crossman, R., *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, Hamish Hamilton/Jonathan Cape, 1977, volume 3, entry for 27 April 1968.

32 This tradition derives from feudal times, but was expressed more recently by A. V. Dicey, the great Victorian constitutional writer, in for example, *Introduction to the Study of the Constitution*, 1885 (8th edn. 1915, Macmillan); see more recently still, Young, H., *Guardian*, 15 September 1988 and Weir and Beetham 1999 op cit.

33 Weir and Beetham 1999, op cit; 999; Foster, C., *British Government in Crisis or The Third English Revolution*, Hart, Oxford, 2005.

34 Beetham, D., Byrne, I., Ngan, P., and Weir, S., *Democracy under Blair*, Politico's, 2002; Klug, F., 'A Bill of Rights: Do we need one or do we already have one?', Irvine Lecture, University of Durham, 2 March 2007; Hailsham, Lord, *The Dilemma of Democracy*, Collins, Glasgow, 1978.

35 See for example Hennessy, P., *Muddling Through: Power Politics and the Quality of Government in Post-war Britain*, Victor Gollancz 1996.

36 See further Rhodes, R. A. W., and Dunleavy, P., (eds), *The Prime Minister, Cabinet and Core Executive*, Macmillan 1995; Smith, M.J., *The Core Executive in Britain*, Macmillan 1999.

power in the popular chamber, its flexible powers and the constitutional weakness of the House of Lords makes Parliament and its law-making powers subordinate to the will of the executive; and since Parliament's legal sovereignty is thereby at the disposal of the executive, the judiciary too is subordinate to the executive (though not without profound influence, as the law lords' decision on the detention of foreign terror suspects in 2004 made clear). No one political figure, not even the 'presidential' Prime Minister, has absolute power over all issues within the executive or even over their backbench MPs, but since 1979 Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair have greatly developed prime ministerial powers at 10 Downing Street; as we have seen, Blair conducted the run-up to war against Iraq in a small group of ministers and officials in isolation from the cabinet. After 1997, Gordon Brown entrenched the Treasury's power, at the expense of the cabinet, departmental ministers and Whitehall.

The executive is made strong by the flexible and uncertain nature of constitutional arrangements; by the fusion, rather than separation, of powers; and by the effects of rigid discipline, party loyalty and patronage upon its majority in the Commons. The principle of ministerial responsibility to Parliament ensures that the sole duty of the civil service (with limited exceptions) is to the government of the day.[37] As we have seen, knowledge and information are important power resources. The ability to withhold, discover, publish or disseminate information can be crucial (see p.15). It is ministers, not officials, who inform and report to Parliament and ministers who determine which officials may give evidence to Parliament and normally prescribe the terms on which they do so. The new Freedom of Information regime preserves official secrecy in most sensitive areas (especially those that concern policy-making, security, defence, trade and other external matters). The Freedom of Information Act 2000 that established public access to official information also gave cabinet ministers a power of veto over the release of information ordered by the Information Commissioner. [38] It is of course true that government now reveals huge quantities of official information (which enables participation), but at the same time ministers, officials and advisers devote considerable resources and effort to courting and managing the media, as revealed in the evidence taken by the Hutton Inquiry during 2003.[39] It is argued by commentators such as Nicholas Jones and Christopher Foster variously that there is an emphasis on partisan gain in official communications that can lead to misleading information being disseminated and coherent policy development being inhibited.[40]

We ought at this point to register the existence of the intelligence and security agencies, now placed on a statutory basis and officially recognised. These are powerful bodies indeed, the more so because the circumscribed scrutiny of their activities and resourcing leaves them with a great deal of discretion. So what does this recent openness amount to? In his final *Anatomy* Anthony Sampson noted that every 'institution now had to have a public face, to justify itself'. The Secret Intelligence Service (the external intelligence agency, commonly known as MI6), for instance, 'had emerged from a dingy building in Lambeth to occupy a glitzy palace on the Thames' (and now has its own website). But its 'appearance of openness helped to conceal its real workings . . . publicity was the new secrecy.' [41] Gordon Brown is now considering making the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC), the nominal watchdog over the activities of the intelligence services, into a formal select committee of the House of Commons. At the moment, the ISC is a body of parliamentarians appointed by and responsible to the Prime Minister whereas select committees are responsible to Parliament.

People may exercise power at elections at all levels of government, though fewer and fewer of them do so. The national electoral system, as we have seen, does not return fully representative governments nor do local elections in England and Wales (Scotland has just adopted the more proportional STV voting system for local elections which is also in place in Northern Ireland). At devolved level, the Scottish Parliament, Northern Ireland Assembly, the Assembly for Wales and the London Mayor and Greater London Assembly are all elected on more or less proportional systems and the Scottish Parliament has been constructed to enable greater access and engagement between elections. In England and Wales, local government is deprived of sufficient powers and finance for local self-government and has lost many important services and

37 Weir and Beetham 1999, op cit.; Beetham et al, 2002.

38 Beetham et al, op cit. See fn 15 above.

39 http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/

40 See, for instance, Jones, N., *Sultans of Spin: The Media and the New Labour Government* (Orion, London, 1999); and Foster, *British Government in Crisis*.

41 Anthony Sampson, *Who Runs This Place? The Anatomy of Britain in the 21st Century* (John Murray, London, 2004), pp347-8.

functions to regional and local quangos (see below, p. 31) and 'partnerships' which reflect local business, NGOs, voluntary associations and other bodies, but do not have a popular or elected base. Thus English local authorities are neither fully responsible nor fully representative institutions. The government is seeking now to strengthen their capacity to provide 'local leadership' and to encourage participation at local level (see Part 2 below).

Corporate influence on government

None of the major parties now questions the pre-eminence of the City of London and the financial services industry which employs over a million people and provides 10.1 per cent of national income. On financial regulation, there is little between the two main parties. In 1997, Labour's leaders finally renounced all intentions of challenging finance and corporate business interests when they reinvented the party as 'New Labour' and, as the *Guardian*'s Martin Kettle, wrote during the Northern Rock crisis,

> 'allow[ing] the markets to find their own solutions under the operational independence of the Bank [of England] was the alpha and omega of New Labour's historic compromise with the British business class.'[42]

Hence the 'light touch' regulation of the financial sector. The City of London and business interests had to be given a predominant place in national policy-making and the powers of trade unions had to remain curtailed. At the same time Tony Blair and Gordon Brown largely accepted the Thatcherite view that Britain had to succeed in the world as a 'flexible' low-wage economy (though they have introduced the minimum wage and other measures to protect workers which were not on Mrs Thatcher's agenda). Gordon Brown and Mo Mowlam conducted the celebrated 'prawn offensive' in the City during the 1990s (rather than 'beer and sandwiches' with trade union leaders).[43] The close relationship with corporate interests, long anyway a feature of government in the UK, then became one of the main pillars of Labour government policy after 1997. Peter Hyman, an adviser to Blair in opposition and government, provides an account of the early period of the Blair leadership. He describes 'the wooing of the newspapers, the crafting of policy, the people Tony met, the relationship with business' as being 'all about us moving to the centre ground'.[44] Hyman helped 'to organise a business tour of the country, where Tony spoke to every regional Chamber of Commerce and CBI [Confederation of British Industry] at business breakfasts. The message was the same in every place. Labour has changed; you don't need to fear us any more; we can do business together'.[45] Tony Blair's choice of economic adviser when he became Labour leader in 1994 is revealing. He appointed Derek Scott, because, in Scott's words he 'did not want an academic economist, but someone with practical experience and an understanding of financial markets. After twelve years in the City of London and the oil industry, I apparently fitted the bill.'[46]

The desire to maintain good relations with business interests continued in power. Tony Barker analysed the composition of the first 295 task forces set up across Whitehall after 1997 to advise government across a whole spectrum of issues. He found that private and public producers and professional bodies took 70 per cent of the places on such bodies, consumer interests 15 per cent, experts 8 per cent and trade unions 2 per cent.[47] In their book *The Blairs and their Court* Frances Beckett and David Hencke provide an account of how, at Blair's behest, Peter Mandelson made a secret trip in 1997 to Germany to lobby against the introduction of an EU directive ensuring that workers would be informed of possible redundancies by employers.[48] Jack Straw, as foreign secretary, spoke out strongly at the EU foreign ministers' negotiations on the EU Constitution in May 2004 against socio-economic rights that would give trade unions and others the power to 'upset the balance of Britain's industrial relations policy'. The British government had, he told the CBI, put 'the interests of business at the heart of our negotiating position' on the treaty. [49] There has been a de facto deal: the City and big business have been reassured by the government's careful attention to their interests, not least by the inroads that the Private Finance Initiative (guided by a joint Treasury-business quango) and privatisations have made into the public sector, and the government has been able to pursue a more progressive social policy without

42 Kettle, M., 'This financial crisis could be a historic chance for Brown', *Guardian*, 22 September 2007.

43 Ramsey, R., *Prawn Cocktail Party: The hidden power behind New Labour*, Vision Paperbacks, 1998.

44 Peter Hyman, *1 Out of 10: From Downing Street Vision to Classroom Reality* (Vintage, London, 2005), p.55.

45 Peter Hyman, *1 Out of 10: From Downing Street Vision to Classroom Reality* (Vintage, London, 2005), p.55.

46 Scott, D., *Off Whitehall: A View of Downing Street by Tony Blair's Adviser* , I.B. Taurus 2004.

47 Barker, op cit.

48 Beckett, F. and Hencke, D., *The Blairs and Their Court*, Aurum 2004.

49 Speech to CBI, reported in *The Times*, 19 May 2004.

the economy and government finances being de-stabilised.

We have drawn attention above (see p.15) to Steven Lukes's third face of power: the ability to shape the public domain through the beliefs, values and wants that are considered normal or acceptable. One aspect of this 'insidious' face of power lies its ability to establish a broadly held 'common sense' view of the world and society. In this way, the common sense of financial centres in the City of London and of UK business interests exercises exerts a diffuse and long-standing influence on government. New Labour has wooed corporate interests since 1997. But major organised interests and large corporations, along with professional groups, have also long played a significant, often dominant and largely unseen role in government policy-making in Whitehall that pre-dates Gordon Brown's 'prawn offensive' and is likely to outlast New Labour. [50] The relationship between organised interests and departmental officials varies across policy domains, but many interest groups perform an intimate role in the way policies are formulated and their cooperation is often vital to policies being carried out in practice. Their influence on policy-making is exercised through 'policy communities' and 'policy networks' which maintain close and continuing relationships with government departments.[51] The most notorious of such relationships is that between the Ministry of Defence and BAE Systems, Britain's biggest arms company, which receives contracts worth more than £1 billion a year from the MOD. This relationship was thrust into the public eye by the controversy over the alleged bribing of members of the Saudi royal family over the Al-Yamamah arms deals. The *Guardian* recently revealed that the MOD has given 38 security passes to BAE Systems employees, giving access to 'the top levels of the ministry'. Two other departments have also given passes to BAE employees in recent years; and the MOD has also given another 58 other passes to arms firms.[52]

One sign of these continuing close relationships is to be found in the Cabinet Office's ongoing set of 'Capability Reviews', assessing the ability of departments to deliver. The views of stakeholders are a significant aspect of these reviews. We are informed that only very few stakeholders have been consulted in each case and that there has been overlapping consultation with some stakeholders, such as the Confederation of British Industry and Institute of Directors, across several government departments.[53] The Cabinet Office has refused our request under the Freedom of Information Act for details of the stakeholders consulted; we have lodged an appeal. The policy of encouraging interchange in employment between Whitehall and the private sector strengthens such links, valuable though it probably is, and the rewards of the honours system are another mark of business's place in governance.

These continuing relationships take place largely out of sight.[54] They are part of the routine of government, not least because the cooperation of business is often essential to making workable policies in the first place, and then to making them work in practice.

Apart from this routine involvement, business employs the services of increasingly sophisticated professional lobbyists in Whitehall, Westminster (and Brussels).[55]

Perhaps the most significant area in which government and business are closely entwined is foreign trade where Prime Ministers, ministers and foreign office and defence officials act as facilitators and negotiators for major contracts; official bodies like the Export Credits Guarantee Department and the Defence Expert Services Organisation (DESO) fund and promote sales; and British Trade International, a high-level committee of major industrialists, acts as the 'government's lead body on trade development and promotion'.[56] Carne Ross, the former diplomat, has written:

> 'Most large embassies have staffs of attaches tasked to sell arms for British companies. [DESO] is paid for by the taxpayer, not BAE. It is taken as a given within government that selling arms is in "our" national interest.'

As he points out, the public are not consulted on given policies that run counter to public opinion and are never clearly defined or debated, even in government.[57] The Treasury is now seeking to disband DESO, on the grounds that taxpayers should no longer subsidise an 'anachronistic' department which has gained too much influence in Whitehall on behalf of profitable arms companies that pay only

50 See ch. 10, Weir and Beetham, op cit.

51 Weir and Beetham, op cit.

52 *Guardian*, 16 August 2007

53 Private information.

54 See Dowding, K., *The Civil Service*, Routledge 1995; Marsh, D., and Rhodes, R. A. W., *Policy Networks in British Government*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992; Weir and Beetham, op cit.

55 For an analysis of the value of lobbyists, see: John, S., *The Persuaders: When Lobbyists Matter* (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2002).

56 See Burall et al, op cit; Scott, Sir Richard, *Report of the Inquiry into the Export of Defence Equipment and Dual-Use Goods to Iraq and Related Prosecutions*, (the Scott report), HMSO 1995; Public Administration Select Committee, *Government by Appointment: Opening Up the Patronage State*, TSO, July 2003.

57 Ross, C., 'We could pay a grave price for our addiction to arms deals', *Guardian*, 9 June 2007

discounted fees for its services. [58]

Some aspects of corporate influence on government emerge in areas, like public health, where the interests of big business and sound public policy clash. There are many studies of the power of the tobacco, food and pharmaceutical industries to shape and change government policies. The long drawn out vacillations under successive governments over regulating cigarette advertising and sales and then the ban on smoking in public premises were due far more to pressures from the tobacco industry and even the loss of revenue from taxes than fear of an adverse public reaction. The tobacco industry in the UK, as in the USA, was able to fund a major manipulative campaign over more than 40 years to mislead the public and to protect itself from public regulation. Ash (Action on Smoking and Health) [59] published a report in 2001, *Trust Us: We're the Tobacco Industry*, using internal industry documents to catalogue the campaign of deceits. [60] Similarly large food manufacturers have applied breaks to government efforts to educate the public about the effects of eating processed foods and, for example, have resisted efforts to cut down on the unhealthy levels of salt in such foods. The Food Commission [61] regularly reveals the privileged position enjoyed by food manufacturers, most recently in a report revealing how 'aggressive marketing tactics' by baby food companies undermines breast-feeding – normally the healthiest way to feed babies. It found 364 adverts promoting bottle-feeding in just 10 parenting magazines, which ran only eight positive images of breastfeeding. The Commission concluded that the government has consistently failed to take action, despite its commitment to the WHO International Code of Marketing Breastmilk Substitutes.

Corporate interests (and rich individuals) can also turn to other means to influence government policy. Take for example the Ecclestone affair. In opposition, Tony Blair enjoyed a free trip to the Silverstone Grand Prix and a drive around the circuit with racing driver Damon Hill. The head of Formula One, Bernie Ecclestone, later donated £1 million to the Labour Party. Labour took power in 1997 committed to a tobacco advertising ban that would affect F1 finances from cigarette advertising on the racing cars. Blair met a delegation from F1 who secured an opt-out for the sport. [62] Party political donations may or may not have secured preferential treatment, in this as in other cases, but if they do, it is the corporate and rich players who benefit. There is also the dubious world of corporate hospitality wherein companies invite civil servants and politicians (among others) to Covent Garden, Wimbledon, Goodwood, premiership boxes, dinners, balls, etc; the *Guardian* recently revealed the extent of the oil company Chevron's generosity towards officials in the government's Energy Development Unit that regulates Britain's oil and gas industry. [63]

There is ample primary evidence of the privileged access and influence certain groups – notably finance, business and some media – have enjoyed in the world of quangos, the quasi-governmental bodies and agencies to which government devolves much of its practical policy-making and regulatory functions.[64] Government reforms have been introduced to prevent 'cronyism' in appointments to public bodies in general, and to try and achieve a more balanced composition in terms of gender, race and class. Some appointments will now be open to parliamentary scrutiny as well. However detailed investigations into the composition of the plethora of executive and advisory quangos at national and regional level, and local quangos and public partnerships, bear witness to a continuing business and professional hegemony – very largely because the main official criterion for entry into the quango world is 'merit' – a concept that embraces managerial and professional skills and expertise and high levels of education. The structures of quasi-government, or modern governance, rely upon the participation of such people.[65] Advisory quangos, or committees, are a low-visibility and low-cost layer of government that shapes decisions on drugs and medicines, the dangers from radioactive waste, hazardous substances, the chemical ingredients of processed foods and drink and other risks, the quality of air people breathe and numerous other sensitive matters that have an immediate bearing on the daily lives of ordinary people. Yet these specialist committees are often

58 Evans, R., and Leigh, D., 'Treasury plans to shut arms sales department;, *Guardian*, 8 July 2007.

59 http://www.ash.org.uk/ .

60 Hammond, R., and Rowell, A., *Trust Us: We're the Tobacco Industry*, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (USA) and Action on Smoking and Health (UK), May 2001.

61 http://www.foodcomm.org.uk/ .

62 See, for instance: David Hencke, 'A pretty straight sort of guy?', *Guardian*, 11 May 2007.

63 Egawhary, E., 'All in a day's shmoozing for men from the ministry', *Guardian*, 6 July 2007.

64 See, for instance, Cohen, N., *Pretty Straight Guys* (Faber & Faber, London, 2004).

65 See Barker, T., with Byrne, I., and Veall, A., *Ruling by Task Force*, Politico's/Democratic Audit, 1999; Skelcher, C., *The Appointed State: Quasi-Governmental Organizations and Democracy*, Open University Press, Buckingham, 1998; Skelcher, C., Mathur, N., and Smith, M., "The public governance of collaborative spaces: Discourse, design and democracy, *Public Administration* 83 (3), 2005; Slelcher, C., and Sullivan, H., *Working across Boundaries: Collaboration in Public Services*, Palgrave-Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2002; Weir, S., and Hall, W., *EGO TRIP: Extra-governmental organisations in the UK and their accountability*, Charter 88 Trust/Human Rights Centre, University of Essex, 1994; Weir and Hall, *Behind Closed Doors: Advisory Quangos in the Corridors of Power*, Channel Four Television/Human Rights Centre, University of Essex, 1995.

filled with members who are direct representatives of the relevant businesses and experts who have personal and professional interests in the companies and industries on whose products or plans they sit in judgment. These bodies are largely closed spaces and government and big business go to great lengths to keep them so.[66] At the Treasury, Gordon Brown retained and re-constituted an early task force as Partnerships UK, a semi-independent body of City and business leaders alongside Treasury officials that shapes PFI policy; and his established practice of employing business people in official posts became news when among donors to his brief campaign for the Labour party leadership were a variety of men who had held official advisory and policy posts for the Treasury. [67] In an interview for the *Guardian*, Brown indicated that his 'government of all the talents' would include businesspeople and experts, 'the type of people I have brought in to do reports';[68] one prominent non-politician he has appointed to his government as a life peer is Sir Digby Jones, the former CBI chief.

The media – 'unelected legislators'?

Given the central part that knowledge and information play in the possession and use of power the print and broadcast media are inevitably significant both as powers in their own right – and as power-brokers. Given their mediating role, governments, industries, political parties, lobbies, pressure and research groups, and a host of organisations are constantly providing the media with information, often employing public relations consultants, to make sure that the media pass on the information that they want them to. The media are also of course influenced by the ideologies, or 'common sense' of the time, and their own 'news values', when deciding upon what to give priority to within the mass of information they receive.

Largely unaccountable press and media barons and businesses have long exercised a diffuse and at times a precise degree of power over government through their ownership and control of significant organs of the media. Anthony Sampson, who coined the phrase 'unelected legislators' to describe the British press, quotes the philosopher Onora O'Neill's statement in her 2002 Reith lectures, 'the press has acquired unaccountable power that others cannot match'. [69] Political scientists tend to question the commonly held belief that the press in particular exercises tangible political influence; politicians like Neil Kinnock, who ascribed the Labour's loss of the 1992 general election to a strident *Sun* campaign against him, are quite certain that it does.

Corporate business has gradually been taking ownership of the mass media into fewer and fewer hands. News International, the largest UK media player, is the UK operation of Rupert Murdoch's global conglomerate based in the USA. As well as BSkyB, News International owns four national newspapers, publishing firms and magazines in the UK. There is considerable cross-ownership in the UK of commercial television channels, national, regional and local newspapers, publishing houses and radio stations. The BBC, a public corporation and itself a major player, stands apart, providing television, radio and internet information as a public service. The public regulator, Ofcom, and the Office of Fair Trading both have powers to ensure that there is a plurality of ownership in the broadcast media. Ofcom also has a brief to ensure the width and quality of programmes on British television. There is no equivalent regulation or supervision of the print media, apart from the weak industry-run Press Complaints Commission.

Rupert Murdoch has come almost to personify media power in the UK. According to Sampson, Murdoch has wielded 'a major political and financial influence here for over 35 years' and loves 'the naked exercise of power':

> 'He imposed his political policies on his papers: his belief in unfettered free enterprise, his opposition to the euro and his support for the war in Iraq. But his overriding policy was to protect and extend his own business empire, for which he relentlessly bullied and charmed successive British prime ministers.' [70]

There is no question about the effect of Murdoch's influence upon government since 1997.

A BBC Radio 4 documentary by political columnist Steve Richards and the diaries of Lance Price, deputy to Alastair Campbell at 10 Downing Street, have both chronicled the depth of Tony Blair's courtship of Rupert Murdoch and the importance he attached to maintaining good relations with the owner of the *Sun*.[71] Tony Blair began wooing Murdoch from the moment he became leader of the Labour party and carried on doing so right up to attending a Murdoch weekend

66 Weir and Hall, *Behind Closed Doors*, op cit.

67 Brown, C., *The Independent*, 1 June 2007; Eaglesham, J., *FT.com*, 30 May 2007.

68 Ashley, J., 'Glimpses of the real Gordon,' *Guardian G2*, 30 May 2007.

69 Sampson, A., *Who Runs this Place? The Anatomy of Britain in the 21st Century*, John Murray, 2004.

70 Sampson, op cit.

71 Richards, S., 'A Very Special Relationship', BBC Radio 4, 5 February 2007; Price, L., *The Spin Doctor's Diary*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2005.

conference at Pebble Beach, California, in July 2006. Murdoch was even described as the 'hidden member of Tony Blair's cabinet.' Entries in Price's diary recount, for example, 'Whenever any really big decisions had to be taken, I had the impression that Murdoch was always looking over Blair's shoulder'; in January 2001, with an election close, he notes, 'we've reassured Murdoch there won't be an immediate euro referendum after the election.'

But Murdoch was not alone in exercising influence upon government. In mid-2000, a series of leaked memos between Tony Blair and his strategist, Philip Gould, revealed the fear inside the Prime Minister's camp of losing touch with 'middle England'. Blair himself wrote to Gould about his sense that the government was losing touch with 'gut British instincts', listing four out of five issues that the *Daily Mail*, the self-appointed advocate of middle class (or 'middle England') values, had set out the same day in an editorial critical of the 'liberal establishment'. A memo from Gould to the Prime Minister in reply noted, 'We have been New Labour on the economy but we have appeared soft on crime, not pro-family, lacking in gut patriotic instincts'.[72] For Gould, the editorial approach of the *Mail* and other non-Labour newspapers was apparently the most influential filter for assessing the government's reputation. [73] At the time the political journalist Hugo Young wrote, 'Though the *Daily Mail* isn't mentioned in these memos, it is the fountain-head of wisdom Blair must tap into, notwithstanding the fact, which Gould well knows, that only 13% of its readers contributed their vote to the Labour landslide.'[74] It is not just a question of the Prime Minister. The diaries of David Blunkett, the Blair-era cabinet minister, show how deeply ministers too felt the need to court newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* and their staff.[75]

The influence of the media is not of course confined to high politics. Press and broadcast coverage can have a significant impact upon the *Zeitgeist* and on a wide variety of significant issues. One well-documented case is that of media coverage of asylum seekers, especially by the tabloid press between 2004 and 2006. Among various reports, an Article 19 study of the coverage of asylum by six newspapers concluded that they distorted the 'scale and nature of the asylum "problem"' and disregarded concerns about the human rights and welfare of 'vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees'. The report criticised the loose use of language and statistics; and even the broadcast media were found to have distorted understanding by their use of images of would-be asylum seekers and refugees in France.[76] The Joint Committee on Human Rights expressed concern about 'inflammatory' news stories and headlines, such as the *Daily Express*'s front-page headings, 'Asylum seekers spreading Aids across Britain' and 'Bombers are all spongeing [sic] asylum seekers' (after the London bombings). Alan Travis, the *Guardian* home affairs editor, told the committee that the *Express* had run front-page stories, some of them 'manifestly false', on asylum 22 times over 31 days in 2003. The stories were 'based mostly on "guesstimates"'.[77]

Nevertheless, we should equally acknowledge that important sections of the print and broadcast media do exert countervailing influences and provide society with valuable information and interpretation of government and other activity, and very often have a beneficial effect on public policy. As Dowding remarks, 'an important part of empowering citizens is not only a free press, but an investigative one.'[78]

Power in the workplace

Democracy in Britain stops at the factory gate or office door; indeed, as David Coats, of the Work Foundation, observes, the very term 'industrial democracy' is used 'sparingly in polite political society'.[79] It is of course the case that unemployed people as a group enjoy far less power than those in work and are more likely to be socially excluded, and as such denied full rights of citizenship. But once at work, Coats argues that the governing assumption that workers and employers enjoy an approximate equality of power, that contracts of employment are freely entered into, and that workers are free to leave if they find their employers oppressive, does not bear examination. The employment contract is based on a fundamental inequality of power. Coats cites the labour law expert Otto Kahn-Freund who wrote in 1983:

> '[T]he relation between an employer and an isolated employee is typically a relation between a bearer of power and one who is not a bearer of power.'[80]

72 Pierce, A., and Webster, P., 'Labour is adrift', *The Times*, 19 July 2000.

73 Beetham, D., et al, *Democracy under Blair*.

74 Young, H., 'The leaks show whose head must role", *Guardian*, 20 July 2000.

75 See, for instance, Blunkett, D., *The Blunkett Tapes: My Life in the Bear Pit*, Bloomsbury 2006.

76 Article 19, *Media Coverage of Asylum Seekers: What's the Story?*. Article 19, 1 August 2003.

77 See www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6288539

78 Dowding, op cit.

79 Coats, D., 'No going back to the 1970s? The case for a revival of industrial democracy', *Public Policy Research*, December 2006

80 Kahn-Freund, O., *Labour and the Law*, Stevens and Sons, 1983, cited in Coats, D., op cit.

For the majority of workers, this simple fact is overridden or 'concealed' by reputable employers who treat their employees with respect, deploy state-of-the-art human resources techniques, introduce flexible working, run equality and diversity programmes, and so on. Moreover, there is now panoply of worker rights that govern minimum wages, working conditions, discriminatory practice, redundancy, etc. Many workers expect to have good relations with their employers. The Citizen Audit records one sign of a relatively benign work regime in the UK: nearly four out of five people who tried to improve their working conditions turned to their employer, nearly two thirds to fellow workers and just one in five to a trade union (multiple answers to the question asked were possible; the authors don't record responses to the follow-up question on outcomes).[81] The 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey also suggests that levels of job satisfaction are relatively high. However it also shows that only a third of employees are satisfied with their involvement in decision-making in the workplace and one in six are concerned about their employment security. [82] Here, as may be expected, inequalities creep in. The Citizen Audit found that workers in general felt that they had 'some' or even 'a great deal' of influence on three work issues – work time, organisation and conditions. But there were also substantial minorities (up to 43 per cent on work time) who felt that they had no influence at all; and these minorities contained twice as many manual workers as professional or managerial workers. Almost two thirds of manual workers said that they had no influence over their work time, and almost a half said they had no influence over work organisation or conditions.[83]

As Polly Toynbee wrote recently, large companies with reputations to lose are rarely the worst employers. She concentrated instead on the contribution that 'shockingly low pay and status' McWork jobs made to 'Britain's class stratified, low-pay, non-home-owning low social mobility' and the profound inequality that it causes: 'the pressing issue', she wrote, 'is the great unregulated mass of truly bad jobs'.[84] She argued that British law allowed firms to escape paying the minimum wage; that the gangmasters' licensing law only covered agriculture, deliberately omitting caring, cleaning, catering and hospitality where illegal work keeps wages low; and that the work inspection regime is kept deliberately 'soft'. Britain was opposed to a current EU directive to stop the exploitation of agency staff who can be fired on the spot at any time within one year of employment, and fired just before the end of the year to be re-employed the next day. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has also identified difficulties and loopholes in the enforcement of the minimum wage as well as criticising its relatively low level (which the state subsidises through tax credits);[85] and has repeatedly drawn attention to the poor conditions endured by agency workers.[86]

Such facts are of a piece with government's cultivation of a flexible workforce and its reluctance to impose 'regulatory burdens' on employers in the way of legal protections and effective inspection. For the past 30 years the UK has consistently failed to meet its obligations under international conventions on economic, social and workplace rights, such as the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the European Social Charter; and the conventions of the International Labour Organisation.[87] The Institute of Employment Rights adds,

> 'there is a great deal that needs to be done in terms of statutory amendment if British law is to be brought fully into line with what are minimum standards set by the international human rights community.'

Even after modest reforms in employment law and the UK's acceptance of the EU Social Chapter, Tony Blair was able to proclaim that the changes 'would leave British law the most restrictive on trade unions in the western world'.[88]

The barrister John Hendy QC and researcher Gregor Gall state that as a result, the 'freedom of action' of trade unions, the bodies that aim to protect workers and assert their rights, is 'so legally confined as to be verging on the non-existent.'[89] The right to strike, an essential element in the capacity of workers and their trade unions to protect their working conditions and livelihoods, is still denied. Investigating the collapsing UK car industry in 2001 the Commons Trade and Industry Committee concluded that: 'the

81 Pattie, C., Seyd, P., and Whiteley, P., *Citizenship in Britain: Values, Participation and Democracy*, Cambridge University Press 2005.

82 Coats, op cit.

83 Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley, op cit.

84 Toynbee, P., 'McJobs are giving Britain a reputation as Europe's offshore banana republic', *Guardian*, 25 May 2007.

85 http://www.tuc.org.uk/em_research/tuc-12360-f0.pdf .

86 http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/sectorreport.pdf .

87 See memorandum from the Institute of Employment Rights to the parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, 31 March 2004, http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt200304/jtselect/jtrights/183/183we15.htm .

88 Blair, T., article in *The Times*, 31 March 1997.

89 Hendy, J., and Gall, G., British Trade Union Rights Today and the Trade Union Freedom Bill', in *The Right to Strike: From the Trades Disputes Act 1906 to a Trade Union Freedom Bill 2006* (Institute of Employment Rights, Liverpool, 2006.

suggestion that it is easier and cheaper to dispose of employees in the UK than elsewhere seems to us to have been shown to be factually correct'.[90] Even reputable companies are willing to exploit their power in the workplace. For example, in March 2007 the Royal Bank of Scotland felt able to warn 14,000 of its staff that they faced disciplinary action if they did not open accounts with the RBS for their salaries to be paid into, prompting a complaint from the union Amicus.[91]

The restrictions on trade union intervention on behalf of workers open the door to aggressive anti-union strategies by companies like Gate Gourmet and Friction Dynamics. Such strategies are themselves a symptom of the neo-liberal world order. In August 2005 Gate Gourmet, a US-owned transnational organisation which produces in-flight catering for British Airways (BA) flights, pursued what the *Daily Mirror* described as a 'pre-planned stratagem to reduce the size of its workforce and the pay and conditions of those who remained.'[92] The company introduced 130 agency workers on lower rates of pay; and when the existing workers assembled to discuss the manoeuvre, and while union representatives were meeting with managers, the company gave the assembled workers a megaphone ultimatum: return to work within three minutes or you are sacked. Nearly all the workers who failed to return immediately to work were sacked; those who turned up the next day were given the choice of signing new contracts on worsened terms or unemployment. Gate Gourmet employees and then airport workers at Heathrow, including baggage handlers, came out on strike. The Transport and General Workers' Union had to disavow the Gate Gourmet strike because – by its nature, being forced suddenly upon the workers by the introduction of casual labour – it could not comply with legal requirements for ballots and advance notices. Moreover, the sympathy strike was a 'secondary' action (despite the close links between BA and Gate Gourmet) which no union could lawfully support. Ultimately Gate Gourmet was able to 'shed 541 workers' jobs' by paying the equivalent of redundancy funds to 411 of them and kept a smaller staff on worse pay and conditions.[93]

Because the action was neither lawful nor official, Gate Gourmet workers were unable to claim they had been subject to unfair dismissal. But in any case protection against arbitrary dismissal is limited at best. In December 2002, 86 workers sacked by Friction Dynamics, a car parts manufacturer, were ruled to have been unfairly dismissed. They had taken balloted action with notice served against the effective de-recognition of their union, the TGWU, a precursor to imposing adverse terms and conditions. But the reinstatement orders issued by the employment tribunal were – as is often the case – unenforceable. [94]

David Coats identifies also the need for an effective right to information and consultation in the work place.[95] He writes that 'bad employment' – a 'lack of control over the pace of work and the key decisions that affect the workplace' and the absence of 'procedural justice' in the workplace – has malign consequences for employees. They can suffer from poorer health and lower life expectancy as a consequence. Yet – as Coats goes on – improvements to workplace rights are seldom justified as ends in themselves. Rather they are often presented as a means of achieving greater productivity.

Participation in local governance

Local democracy is important for the exercise of power and political participation because most opportunities for people to play a part in decisions which affect the quality of their own and their neighbours' lives normally occur at local level. Studies of participation have shown that most people participate at this level – though not necessarily on the local government issues on which we focus our attention here.[96] There are other important areas affecting people's lives at local level – e.g., planning or health services – that we leave aside here owing to constraints on our resources. Nevertheless the role, scope and powers of elected local government are significant insofar as local authorities are able to determine local priorities and concerns and modify national policies in a representative manner.

There is of course a proper tension between national, regional and local policy-making: some policies have to be agreed and laid down nationally or regionally. However, the democratic structures that should govern the disposition and use of power between the three levels are deficient. There is no elected tier of regional government, save in a sense the Greater London Assembly (though some county councils are arguably regional bodies). Instead in England and

90 http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200001/cmselect/cmtrdind/128/12811.htm#a41 .

91 'RBS threatens to discipline staff who don't open company bank account', *Herald*, 24 March 2007.

92 *Daily Mirror*, 12 August 2005.

93 Hendy and Gall, op cit.

94 Hendy and Gall, op cit.

95 Coats, D., 'No going back to the 1970s? The case for a revival of industrial democracy'.

96 Parry, G., Moyser, G., and Day, N., *Political Participation and Democracy in Britain*, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Wales there is at regional level a governing structure of nine Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and nine Government Offices of the Regions (under Gordon Brown, the voluntary regional assemblies are being abolished). The RDAs are quangos with considerable powers to drive and coordinate economic development and regeneration and have now been given responsibility for preparing 'single' regional economic, social and environmental strategies under the Brown government's review 'of sub-national economic development and regeneration.' [97] The Government Offices represent 11 Whitehall departments in the regions, implementing departmental policies and coordinating decision-making generally. Regional assemblies used to be charged with making RDAs accountable. It seems that the Prime Minister is now creating a new structure for regional accountability through Parliament. In June 2007, he appointed ministers for the English regions who are to be subject to 'formal and consistent parliamentary scrutiny' through newly-established regional select committees in the House of Commons.

Lower down the scale, there are two main tiers of local government in England – large county councils, London boroughs and unitary city-based authorities and smaller district authorities, both urban and rural. Local government in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland follows a single-tier model, based on counties and country boroughs (Wales), council areas (Scotland) and districts (Northern Ireland).

Responsible and representative local government, able to satisfy local needs and priorities and to adjust 'top-down' policies and decisions to reflect those needs and priorities as well as specific local conditions, is vital to participative democracy. However, local government in this country has been gravely weakened, in terms of independent resources, powers and functions; and, crucially, has no constitutional protection against the inroads that central government has made into its role over the past 50 years. Governments have continually re-organised, abolished, re-made and dismembered local authorities in the UK.[98] On most counts, central controls over policy and finance and the absence of adequate tax-raising powers contravene the standards of the European Charter for Local Self-Government that the UK government has signed.[99]

The government has increasingly recognised the potential value of local contribution to public services determined centrally with a new emphasis on localised 'place shaping'.[100] Indeed, John Healey, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, once again emphasised 'the compelling case for reform' to give local authorities and communities greater responsibilities and opportunities in his 17 July statement to the House of Commons.[101] But thus far the supposed 'new localism' falls far short of local self-government on the European model, let alone the ideal promulgated by the 1986 Widdicombe inquiry of a local government able to provide 'political checks and balances, and a restraint on arbitrary government'. [102] And the less autonomous local authorities are, the smaller is the scope for meaningful participation.

On the face of it, therefore, the Labour government's new emphasis on greater public participation and new forms of democratic practice in decision-making at local and neighbourhood level clearly has much to do to address the 'democratic deficit' [103] between national and local government and to create more self-confident citizens able to participate in determining their futures. Since 2000, there has been a surge of consultation exercises, area committees, citizens' juries, user groups and other participative forums, and even briefly community elections, reflecting what are viewed as communities of interest or identity.

This trend was given a new impetus after the creation of the new Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in 2005. In January 2006, the then minister David Miliband gave a keynote speech, setting out a range of models by which local communities may be given more power over the delivery of local services, including neighbourhood managers, petitions, satisfaction surveys, delegated budgets, neighbourhood charters and parish councils. [104] His initiative was followed by a local government white paper in October 2006 designed to re-shape public services around the communities who use them. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill Act seeks to consolidate this shift in public policy for England

97 See the statement by John Healey, local government minister, HC Hansard Debates, 17 July 2007 (col.161).

98 See the Widdicombe report, *The Conduct of Local Authority Business*, Cmnd 9797, HMSO, 1986; Bradley, A. W., and Ewing, K., *Constitutional and Administrative Law*, Pearson Longman 2007; Weir and Beetham, op cit.; and Beetham et al, op cit.

99 Weir and Beetham, op cit.; and Beetham et al, op cit.

100 See www.lyonsinquiry.org.uk

101 See fn. 133 above.

102 The 'Widdicombe' report, op cit.

103 Stewart, J., *From innovation in democratic practice towards a deliberative democracy*, School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham, 1999.

104 The speech was converted into an official Office of the Deputy Prime Minister local:vision website pamphlet, *Empowerment and the deal for devolution: a discussion document*, February 2006, www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1163597 .

by enacting many of the white paper's proposals.[105]

The Act aims to empower local citizens and communities by placing local authorities under a duty to secure their participation in the design and delivery of public services, both their own and those of other official 'partners'. It introduces the 'Community Call for Action', a device designed to strengthen the ability of local councillors to speak up for their constituents and demand answers when things go wrong by enabling them to involve a council's overview and scrutiny committees in resolving issues of concern. (The Police and Justice Act 2006 enables people to take crime and disorder problems to councillors who must then investigate and possibly involve new crime and disorder committees in dealing with the problem.)

Initially this 'Community Call' gave the power to *communities* to demand answers, but it got watered down to give rights to *councillors* who already have the moral right to demand answers. There are moves to reinvigorate and create parish (possibly re-named as 'community', 'village' or 'neighbourhood') councils – 'the most local tier of local government' – to act as the voices of local communities and to deliver services in partnership with the councils above them. [106] Various measures are being introduced to create stronger and more visible council leadership, to reform the standards regime for local councillors, to allow for changes in electoral arrangements, to encourage community involvement in owning and running local services and facilities, and to give more weight to petitions. [107] The Act creates only a duty to 'inform, consult and involve' people, not a right to participate. However local people should be able at least to press for full consultation through judicial review in the courts; as the recent Greenpeace test case on government consultation on the new round of nuclear power stations showed, [108] the courts are developing the law on what constitutes 'genuine' consultation that sets standards for consultative process by government at local as well as national level.

As this brief summary of the position in England [109] up to July 2007 indicates, a great variety of 'handles' or opportunities for taking some hold on power are being created, and many authorities are taking the trend further (for example, Harrow and Salford are among a group of authorities which have been pioneering participatory budgeting, first practiced in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in which local communities share in the budget-making process). The authors of an in-depth study of recent public participation projects in two English cities note,

'channels of access to the political system are widening, new opportunity structures are being opened up, and more active forms of dialogue are being fostered. In the process not only are some "lay" publics becoming more expert in how to navigate the public policy system, but public service workers are being exposed to new experiences and encounters that have the capacity to change their orientation in what they do.' [110]

The Brown effect

The Prime Minister has announced and begun work on ambitious plans to reinvigorate democracy in the United Kingdom. Many of the changes floated in the green paper on governance have the potential to redistribute power or powers away from the core executive. Here we briefly describe his democratic 'route map' through the prism of local participation. The green paper on governance pledges that the government will 'better enable local people to hold service providers to account; place a duty on public bodies to involve local people in major decisions; assess the merits of giving local communities the ability to apply for devolved or delegated budgets'; and 'reinvigorate our democracy, with people proud to participate in decision-making at every level'.[111] These pledges derive originally from the white paper[112] and essentially pull together those initiatives. The green paper's major innovation is a pledge that the government will work with the Local Government Association to establish a concordat governing the relations between central and local government:

'This will establish for the first time an agreement on the rights and responsibilities of local government, including its responsibilities to provide effective leadership of the local area and to empower local communities where possible.'

105 Department for Communities and Local Government, *Strong and prosperous communities*, Cm 6939, TSO, 2006; available at www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id+1503999.

106 House of Commons Library, *The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill,* Research Paper 07/01, House of Commons Library, January 2007.

107 House of Commons Library, op cit.

108 See www.consultationinstitute.org/research/briefingpapers.asp; see also Mr Justice Webber's definition of consultation, in *R v Secretary of State for Social Services, ex parte the Association of Municipal Authorities*, 1986.

109 As the governance green paper, states, "Communities in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales also have measures to hold service providers to account'; Ministry of Justice, *The Governance of Britain*, op cit. Consideration of these 'measures' is outside our scope.

110 Barnes, M., Newman, J., and Sullivan, H., *Power, Participation and Political Renewal: Case studies in public participation*, The Policy Press, Bristol, 2007; see also www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk

111 *The Governance of Britain*, op cit.

112 Op cit, see fn 122.

The local governance framework[113]

However, the trend towards greater participation is taking place not within a comprehensive framework of elected local *government*, but within the wider, more diverse and often opaque structure of regional and local *governance*. The most significant decisions will take place at the higher reaches of a governance structure of strategic partnerships and will be negotiated between the larger local authorities, the major official 'delivery partners' and the government – in day-to-day practice, the Government Office for the Region, a largely invisible but highly influential institution.[114] These complex structures by their nature make participation more difficult for citizens. The partnerships bring together public agencies and regional quangos with private, business, community and voluntary organisations; the larger local authorities involved are only one actor and not necessarily the decisive actor, though they are formally to 'lead' the partnerships.

Under the Brown government's new proposals, the RDAs, unelected regional quangos, will have a commanding role, preparing 'single regional strategies', though they will be under a duty 'to consult'.[115] Local authorities will also be asked to prepare their own 'visions for sustainable development.' Among other significant non-elected players, the Housing Corporation's five regional offices play a commanding role in providing social housing and directing growth agendas. [116] Overall, too, the government's regional offices will continue to act as ring-holders for strategic priorities and funding streams and the guardians of government priorities.

The smaller 238 district councils below county councils have only a minimal role in this high-level activity. The strategic agreements are supposed to take their plans into account and, like primary care trusts, the police and other local agencies, they are required to be involved in the high-level negotiations. But it is not clear how, especially now that the RDAs are to become more powerful still. Yet they are closer to local communities than the huge unitary and county authorities and the major bodies that will compile the strategic agreements (Kent for example is supposed to serve 1.37 million people, Essex 1.34 million). Philip Bostock, chief executive at Exeter (a district authority), has observed that the 'relentless growth' of these high-level agreements is impelling district authorities to seek higher unitary status:

'As more central funding streams are diverted to the county-wide pot, so local power, influence and accountability ebbs away. This is potentially damaging for any district, but for cities like Exeter, it will seriously undermine their ability to do what they do best – deal with the complexity of uniquely urban issues and drive economic growth for the wider region.'[117]

The debate over the relationship between the size of governing institutions and democracy has been ongoing since Athens became the first democratic state (of a sort) in 50 BC. Plato calculated that the optimum size for a flourishing democracy was 5,040; Aristotle felt this was too many.[118] By these standards, but also by the standards of other west European states, local authorities in Britain are too large and too remote from local communities to be properly representative and open to the views of local citizens. Several studies have established that local authorities in the UK are by far the largest in west Europe. [119] Their size is a factor in the low turnout in local elections, thus diminishing the prospect of an electorate able to exercise political control through the ballot box. The mean turnout up from 1995 to 2005 has been 35 per cent against a mean of 66.3 per cent across EU member states. [120] First-past-the-post local elections in England and Wales produce distorted results which make a nonsense of the idea that local people can exercise a measure of representative power over a council's policies through the ballot box. For example, in May 2007, a majority of people in at least seven councils voted for one party but woke to find that another party had seized control.[121]

Moreover the local unelected quango state often has more power over resources than elected local authorities, diminishing further the power of the ballot. For example, in their study of governance in Burnley and Harrogate, two district authorities, Wilks-Heeg and Clayton found that the combined spend of Burnley and Lancashire County Council came to 40 per cent of the total of public money spent in the

113 This section is based on the House of Commons Library briefing report on the Local Government and Public Involvement Bill, Research Paper 07/01, January 2007, augmented by an interview with Jane Foot and comments by Jane Foot and Peter John on a first draft (see Acknowledgements)

114 House of Commons Library briefing; interview with Jane Foot.

115 Healey, J., statement to House of Commons, HC Hansard Debates, 17 July 2007 (col. 161).

116 See www.housingcorporation.gov.uk/server/shiw/nav.394

117 Bostock, P., 'The joys of being single', *Municipal Journal*, 30 November 2006.

118 Dearlove, J., *The Reorganisation of British Local Government: Old orthodoxies and a political perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979.

119 Beetham, D., Byrne, I., Ngan, P., and Weir, S., *Democracy under Blair*, Politico's, 2002. See also Swianiewicz, P. (ed), *Consolidation or Fragmentation? The size of local governments in Central and Eastern Europe*, LGI Books, Budapest, 2002

120 Wilks-Heeg, S., and Clayton, S., *Whose Town is it Anyway? The state of democracy in two northern towns*, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, York, 2006.

121 Polly Toynee, *The Guardian*, 10 May 2007.

area. Burnley's own spending as a proportion of all public spending in its area came to only 7 per cent. Thus more than half the public expenditure in the council's area was in the hands of unelected bodies.[122]

The overall point is, local governance is a highly complex and fluid governing structure within which power varies according to the issues at hand and it is impossible to locate accountability within the various governing partnerships. Even the strategic partners involved are confused about their respective roles, let alone outsiders who wish to know where and how to intervene. The government's own assessment found that

> 'evidence has shown that partnership working is not always effective or comprehensive. Lines of accountability for achieving targets are often unclear. Community Strategies are not always underpinned with a firm evidence base and are often disjointed from delivery mechanisms.'[123]

It is thus hard to determine where accountability lies, especially as the governing structures are being re-assembled. The new local government bill will empower local authority overview and scrutiny committees to review and scrutinise the actions of local partners in regard to targets. John Healey's statement, cited above, stresses the need for 'further freedoms' and 'greater powers, flexibilities and incentives' for local authorities. [124] However, for the moment, the two powerful bodies in these processes, the RDAs and Government Offices of the Region, are effectively accountable upwards to Whitehall.

Further, the Local Government Ombudsman, Tony Redmond, also issued a special report on local partnerships on 10 July 2007, saying, 'The problems involved in handling complaints where there is a partnership of service providers need to be addressed urgently'. In the special report the three Local Government Ombudsmen for England highlighted the difficulties members of the public often have in knowing who they should complain to and how. They say, too, that councils often do not have proper, clear procedures and protocols for handling these complaints.[125]

122 Wilks-Heeg and Clayton, op cit.

123 DCLG, Regulatory impact assessment, October 2006: www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1504070

124 HC Debs, 17 July 21007, col. 161.

125 www.lgo.ng.uk/special-reports.htm

Part 3 Handles on power

Here we describe and assess the government's commitment to consultation and participation up to the end of the premiership of Tony Blair. We consider the formal state provisions that give citizens a grasp on power and means of complaint and redress; we examine the ability of civil society and the trade unions to provide countervailing influence on power in the UK; and we consider the more ambivalent role of political parties as instruments of participation and power brokers. We also consider the potential role of the internet.

Government policies on participation

Throughout Tony Blair's premiership there was an emphasis on consultation that grew into ministerial commitments to participation in 2007, a trend that looks likely to be more significant under Gordon Brown.[1] The most prominent spokesperson for this shift in emphasis among younger ministers was probably David Miliband who stepped up the new drive towards participation at local level as Minister at the Department for Communities and Local Government. In an article in the *New Statesman* on 2 April 2007, Miliband wrote of the politics of 'I can' for a 'more demanding, educated, savvy population [who] want the power and control that modern progressive politics can offer:

'The era of "I can" is the culmination of the long decline of deference and automatic authority. It is the late flowering of individual autonomy and control. It is, in other words, one of the founding ideas of left-of-centre politics: to put power in the hands of the people. People want to be players, not just spectators. … "I can" must be combined with a sense of "we can" -the belief that there is a shared willingness within each community that individuals' actions will be reciprocated by others.'

There is however concern, expressed well in the *Guardian* by Professor Ruth Lister, a specialist on poverty, that, 'Under the meritocratic model of social justice espoused by Blair, both privilege and deprivation make a mockery of the aspirations of those unable to climb the ladder.'[2] We have yet to see what power over their lives the Brown government will offer the 'I can'ts'.

The Blair governments combined a commitment to 'strong government' with building on the previous Major government's moves to make space for consultation at national and local level. In reply to a report on participation from the Public Administration Select Committee, the government declared in 2001 that

'Effective participation in central and local government

1 Ministry of Justice, *The Governance of Britain*, Cm. 7170, TSO July 2007.

2 *Guardian Letters*, 14 May 2007.

decision-making by the widest possible range of people and organisations is an important part of the government's commitment to democratic renewal, with change coming from the bottom up as much as top down'.[3]

The government issued a Code of Practice on Consultation, based on the general principle – by no means always adhered to – that major policy decisions should be preceded by seeking the views of interested parties. [4] The extent to which departments consult varies enormously; and just because a body or individual has participated, critics have pointed out, that it does not guarantee their views will be accorded the same importance as others who are more favoured. In the words of Dowding 'civil servants tend to make use of groups when they are useful and ignore them (as far as they can) when they are not.'[5] It may be that appearing to consult is a deliberate means of ignoring certain arguments, through creating a false impression of openness. In an area where a department does not have a particular preference of its own, it may be more amenable to outside influence. It is possible that lobbies which appear strong only do so because their preferences happen to be shared by the relevant department. The government's record has been patchy, sometimes praiseworthy, sometimes opportunistic, sometimes opaque [6]; and when government policies were challenged, sometimes downright antagonistic, as with local challenges to PFI schemes;[7] or sometimes manipulative, as with council tenants who voted in government ballots that their homes should remain in council ownership, contrary to government policy. The government used to deny the additional investment in improving their homes that would have accompanied the transfer of the stock and even forced re-run ballots where authorities retain their housing stock.[8] When it comes to cases, departments have found it hard to identify examples of consultation actually changing outcomes.[9] And as we suggest later (see p.56), government has been unwilling to change policies in the face of citizen protests, even when they have been extensive and well-informed.

Rights and citizen mobilisation

As Keith Dowding points out in *Power*, the state 'enables collective action by the rights it gives for group mobilization'.[10] The civil and political rights guaranteed by the 1988 Human Rights Act (and under the European Convention on Human Rights) – the freedoms of speech, expression, association and assembly – are framed in terms of the individual, but they generally facilitate collective organisation and mobilisation and people can try to enforce them in the courts and obtain redress. The Act's impact on the government's counter-terrorism laws has gained most political and media attention. But the Act is a landmark reform that gives people a set of simple written rights which they can use to hold public authorities to account. Ordinary and very often disadvantaged citizens – and non-citizens – are using it regularly inside but more often outside the courtroom to protect the quality of their lives, to secure their rights to decent and fair public services and to assert their dignity. Through collective action, guided by lawyers, citizen's advice bureaus and organisations such as Help the Aged, it is slowly creating rights-based practice and respect for people within the public services. The Home Office concluded after an official review that the Act is a 'powerful framework' that delivers 'a commonsense balance between the rights of individuals and the rights of victims and communities to be protected against harm'. [11] Literally thousands of destitute and homeless asylum-seekers have received state support since 2005 when the courts ruled that the government's refusal to meet their needs constituted 'inhuman and degrading' treatment. People with disabilities have perhaps benefited most from the Act which has overturned prejudicial practices in a variety of settings. The elderly in care homes, travellers and homeless families are groups who have asserted their right to live in dignity. [12]

The official bodies set up to enhance the position of minorities in British society – the Commission for Racial Equality, the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Disability Rights Commission – have now been amalgamated into a single body, the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR), which is charged with

3 PASC, *Public Participation: Issues and Innovations* (the government's response), HC 334, TSO, 2001.

4 http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/regulation/consultation/code/index.asp

5 Dowding, K., *The Civil Service* (Routledge, London, 1995), p.117.

6 See Weir and Beetham and Beetham et al, op cit; also Kearton, I., *Review of Current Protests*, memorandum, Democratic Audit, May 2003.

7 See the PFI vs Democracy series by McFadyean, M., and Rowland, D., *The Case of Birmingham's Hospitals; Selling off the Twilight Years: the transfer of Birmingham's homes for elderly people;* and *School governors and the Haringey Schools PFI Scheme*, Menard Press, 2002.

8 See for example, Shifrin, T., 'Government accused of denying council tenants choice', *Guardian Society*, 1 July 2004; and generally, www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk

9 PASC, *Public Participation: Issues and Innovations*, HC 373, TSO, 2001.

10 Dowding, op cit.

11 Home Office and Department for Constitutional Affairs, *The Human Rights Act: the DCA and Home Office Review*, Cm 7011, TSO, January 2007; available on www.dca.gov.uk

12 See for example, the 13 case studies in the British Institute of Human Rights pamphlet, *The Human Rights Act – Changing Lives*, BIHR, 2006; Equality and Diversity Forum, *Human Rights and the Human Rights Act*, June 2006, and www.edf.org.uk

promoting the Act's values and contribution. The CEHR and the Act should serve as a focus for collective action at all levels of society. Although the Human Rights Act has provided some protection for people in the social and economic sphere, it does not run to the systematic protection of economic, social and cultural rights that are contained in the UN International Covenant which Britain has ratified [13] – and that Gordon Brown's green paper on governance specifically rules out for the future. [14] The Council of Europe's European Social Charter as well as a substantial body of economic and social rights embedded in basic EU law does however enable British citizens and groups to organise to obtain, for example equal pay and workplace rights and protections that are being gradually and to a limited degree enforced through tribunals and courts up to the European Court of Justice.[15] There are also an unknown number of statutory and other entitlements and regulations that can be brought to bear to assist citizen action. For example, the Race Relations Impact Assessment process aided the campaign that was seeking to repeal the government decision to end free ESOL classes (see p 14); a clause in the Companies Act gave Ben Birnberg access to Tesco's annual meeting (see p.14 above). Official seeds regulations gave anti-GM campaigners a forum for their concerns.

Redress

The Ombudsman service, a variety of tribunals and other formal mechanisms of accountability, complaint and redress, offer citizens and their organisations some grasp on power, if only after the event, and provide a route for influence and change as well as for redress. Central government departments, local authorities, most quangos and regulators are required to provide mechanisms for redress. The scale of the redress operation is huge. Approximately 1.4 million cases are received through central government redress systems, processed by more than 9,300 staff at an annual cost of at least £510 million. Such problems as the complexity and lack of simplicity associated with the redress system (and issues such as the difficulty of making phone complaints) led Professor Patrick Dunleavy recently to tell the Public Administration Select Committee (PASC), 'I do not think we are getting a Rolls-Royce service for the money that is being spent'.[16] The philosophy of redress nowadays partly turns on the concept of the citizen as consumer – an idea that is widely criticised for diminishing the status of the interaction between the individual person and the state. On the other hand, people who are less politically involved may find this means of exercising power a more familiar and appropriate one.

The setting up of the Parliamentary Commissioner, or Ombudsman, was an important stage in the development of the principle that the public had a right to redress for acts of maladministration and misuse of government power in 1967. The aim was to 'humanise the whole administration of the state.'[17] In 1991, the then Prime Minister John Major introduced the Citizen's Charter to tell people what they could expect from public services and make it easier to complain. Major explained in his memoir that the 'big idea' was to raise 'the quality and standing of public service as a whole'. Major was motivated by his economically insecure background and his knowledge that the less privileged were dependent upon public services, but often found them unresponsive. [18] The Citizen's Charter set basic standards of service, promoted best practice across public services and promised more adequate systems of redress. It was not legally enforceable nor supported by additional public spending, but it was flexible and accessible. In 1998 the Charter was re-launched as Service First; in 2004 it became Charter Mark, the 'national standard for excellence in customer service'[19]

Redress has been a significant element in the New Labour government's plans to reorientate public services around consumer needs, but the system as a whole has developed in a piecemeal fashion and is not without inadequacies and arbitrary practice. A National Audit Office report in 2005 found a strong distinction between 'complaints' and 'appeals' in public redress that had no equivalent in the private sector. Around half of central government organisations could not establish how many complaints they had received in a particular year; and there was no single established definition of a complaint. Focus group evidence suggested that citizens 'regard redress arrangements in government organizations as time-consuming and requiring a lot of persistence…to secure a useful outcome.' Tribunals were 'seen as…more formal and

13 Weir, S., *Unequal Britain: human rights as a route to social justice*, Politico's, 2006

14 Ministry of Justice, *The governance of Britain*, TSO, July 2007.

15 Weir, S., *Unequal Britain*, op cit.

16 http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmpubadm/uc251-v/uc25102.htm

17 Labour Party manifesto, *The New Britain*, Labour Party 1964.

18 Major, J., *The Autobiography*, HarperCollins 2000.

19 See www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/chartermark/

more intimidating for ordinary people'. Seemingly influenced by the model of the Dutch National Ombudsman, the NAO report recommended that the government consider establishing a 'single point of contact for impartial information on where to make a complaint or seek redress'.[20]

Government departments are concerned to address issues of the transparency and effectiveness of redress. In 2004 the Department of Constitutional Affairs issued a white paper on simplifying tribunal services, *Transforming Public Services: Complaints, Redress and Tribunals*; [21] in its 2006 white paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, the Department for Communities and Local Government sets out proposals to 'modernise and clarify the role and working practices of the [Local Government] Ombudsman'.[22]

Redress is apparently a process for individual people, not communities. But like the courts, redress mechanisms can be used to further collective remedies (and indeed good redress systems build in a monitoring function). Philip Cullum, deputy chief executive of the National Consumer Council, explained in oral evidence to PASC on 4 April 2007 that,

'I think our evidence suggests that often, as well as their own case, people are concerned more generally about being sure that this [their complaint] is not going to recur for other people . . . so rather than being bought off in their own circumstances, people want some sort of reassurance that in some way it is being fed back into the organisation … They want their own situation to be remedied . . . and they want the system to change for other people'.

MPs nowadays provide a generally effective complaints process and they must be the first port of call for anyone who wants to complain to the Parliamentary Ombudsman. With their improved staffing, dealing with constituents' concerns and complaints (immigration, asylum and tax credits cases bulk large in their workload) is one means for MPs to strengthen their incumbency against electoral challenge. A number of agencies have now set up special MPs' hotlines. Often MPs can be useful to constituents in progressing complaints, though they may not alter the result (indeed they usually pass on a complaint in a neutral fashion, since it is not practical to inquire into its merits). No MP wishing to maintain a constituency profile can nowadays avoid this role, but it is not always welcome. When the late Tony Banks MP stood down from the Commons in 2005 he was quoted as saying that 'all you were was a sort of high-powered social worker and perhaps not even a good one'. [23]

Legal aid is an important component of the system of redress and poor individuals can apply for legal aid from the Community Legal Service, the civil wing of the Legal Services Commission.[24] The service funded nearly 800,000 cases in 2006-07 in such areas as debt, employment, housing, mental health and family law, but legal aid has suffered severe cuts which limit the range of people that can receive it, the issues which it covers and the areas where it is readily available. A Citizen's Advice report of 2004, *The Geography of Advice*, drew attention to the opening up of 'advice deserts'; 'significant parts of the country are inadequately serviced by legal aid lawyers or other appropriate services, and this is likely to intensify.' Two thirds of its local CABs experienced difficulties in finding solicitors to deal with immigration cases. [25]

Private industry and many professions also establish their own 'Ombudsmen', bodies like the Press Complaints Commission and complaints and redress services. However, as Philip Cullum said to PASC, 'professional bodies that assess complaints notoriously favour the industry side, which is why gradually in areas like legal services there has been a shift away from that.'

There is a variety of other public scrutiny bodies, such as the Health and Safety Executive, the Healthcare Commission, regulators like Ofcom and Passengers First, the Office for Judicial Complaints, the Sustainable Development Commission, the Standards Commission (for local government), etc, to which people may turn for information and assistance and even redress. It is impossible to enumerate here all the scrutiny bodies across the public sector to which potential campaigners may turn – and unnecessary. The Centre for Public Scrutiny has published *The Scrutiny Map* that charts for 2005 the range and reach of scrutiny bodies in all levels of government, from the centre to local authorities, and the main public services – criminal justice, education, health and social care, housing and regeneration, public utilities and transport. [26]

20 See http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/595/

21 See http://www.dca.gov.uk/pubs/adminjust/transformfull.pdf .

22 See http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1503999 .

23 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4047123.stm

24 For the Legal Services Commission website, see: http://www.legalservices.gov.uk/

25 See http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/geographyofadvice .

26 Centre for Public Scrutiny, *The scrutiny map: charting the range and reach of scrutiny bodies across the public sector*, CPS (£25 from the EC Group, PO Box 364, Hayes, Middlesex UB3 1US0, June 2005.

Countervailing influences – civil society

We have described the close influence that organised interests have on government policy through policy networks and policy communities (see p.25). However from at least the 19th century onwards, the UK has developed a lively tradition of independent pressure groups, self-help groups, charitable or philanthropic societies, grant-giving foundations and campaigning groups of all kinds. Among other sources of power, the churches, or 'faith communities', can have influence at least on national government and in a huge variety of local campaigns and initiatives, but also – and more importantly – on public opinion, as in the recent 'Make Poverty History' campaign. The UK is also rich in independent non-governmental bodies that can bring influence to bear nationally and globally through government departments, MPs, peers and parliamentary committees, the media and society in general. Just how much influence they actually have varies greatly and is impossible to assess. But these interest groups are undoubtedly important to democratic governance. Some, such as Shelter and the Child Poverty Action Group, seek to ensure that marginal interests are represented; others, like Liberty, the Institute of Fiscal Studies and the Campaign for Freedom of Information, scrutinise, check and report on the activities of government. Charities like Oxfam and War on Want press government on development aid policies as well as seeking to raise substantial sums of money from the public. These bodies can bring specialist knowledge and experience to bear upon public policy and introduce an element of pluralism. Many of them are willing to represent individuals and communities within their areas of interest, taking 'test cases' in the courts and sponsoring participation exercises.

Around 300,000 charities are registered with the Charity Commissioners. Many of these are associations, international, national and local, that in fact have often set out to educate and influence the public and to exert political and social influence, despite the legal prohibition on political campaigning by charities. The government's green paper on governance now pledges to work with the Charity Commissioners to explore giving charities and charitable pressure groups more room for manoeuvre. Even a largely apolitical body like the National Trust can assume a political role. The National Trust, inspired by the desire to protect the ancient Hatfield forest on the edge of Stansted airport, took its place alongside Friends of the Earth and numerous community groups, to oppose the expansion of the airport at the public inquiry that opened in May 2007; John Vidal and Dan Milmo observed in the *Guardian* that,

> 'While the government does not want to disappoint BAA [the British Airports Authority] . . . It is equally wary of upsetting the millions of National Trust members who make up a significant portion of middle England.' [27]

There is an unknowable host of voluntary organisations, though it is possible to enumerate such bodies in particular areas through national lists – the 1994 register of environmental organisations, for example, listed 1,600 organisations. There are producer and professional organisations. All these bodies in one sphere or another can and do bring influence to bear and may prove valuable allies in a campaign. This active associational life is of course open to criticism that, individually or collectively, it is unrepresentative of the public and relevant populations, and tends to favour the already advantaged and articulate (see further Part 4). Such considerations should serve to temper an uncritical enthusiasm for public participation, but they do not alter the main point that active citizenship and a vigorous civil society are necessary components of democratic life. [28]

The Citizen Audit, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, found that in 2000-01 broadly four out of 10 people (40 per cent) were part of this active citizenship – that is, they were members of at least one organised group. Two out of five people belonged to two, three or four groups and 2 per cent to five or more. One in four people participated in the activities of an organisation and one in ten volunteered to work for an organisation. So 18 million people belonged to an organisation, 11 million participated in their activities, and four million volunteered their time. The Audit offered people a list of types of organisation and the bulk of this associational life was not inherently political or social in nature. People were most likely to join a motoring organisation (29 per cent of the total), followed by sporting activity or the gym (14 per cent). Of those with a potential political or social character, trade unions came in at 9 per cent, residents and neighbourhood associations at 6 per cent, professional bodies at 5 per cent, and churches at 3 per cent. A cluster of groups – environmental, animal rights, humanitarian and human

27 Vidal, J., and Milmo, D., 'Stansted Public Inquiry', *Guardian*, 29 May 2007.

28 See further, Beetham et al, op cit, ch. 11.

rights, patients, consumer, women and disabled – each scored 1 per cent; in all, about one in 10 people participated in the activities of a residents, housing or neighbourhood group.[29] Separate British Social Attitudes surveys indicate that organisational membership rose from about one in six people to one in four (25 per cent) from 1994 to 2000; and that some 22 per cent belonged to one or more community organisations, such as Neighbourhood Watch schemes, tenants', resident or parent-teacher associations; and another 22 per cent were members of a trade union or staff association. (Differences in methodology explain the differences between the Citizens Audit and BSA estimates.) However, a vital consideration, three quarters of the population were 'non-joiners'.

Countervailing influences – trade unions

Historically, much working class political activity was collectively channelled through the trade unions; their existence is a classic example of the need for the relatively powerless to organise if they are to exert power. The trade unions created the Labour Party and have long been, and continue to be, a bulwark of the social democratic tradition in British society. In his historical analysis of their role Alastair J. Reid argues that trade unions have made a vital contribution in Britain to the development of human rights and diversity, and have acted as an important check on central government. [30] After 1945, they formed the third element in the post-war era of tripartite 'corporatism' and by the 1970s they were at their height of their social and political power. [31]

Their powerful position, political and economic, was demolished by the trade union laws of Mrs Thatcher's governments after 1979 and the defeat of the miners' strike and has not been restored under New Labour. In the words of Anthony Sampson, 'In the first post-war decades the trades unions were respected and feared by both Labour and Tory governments.' But economic and political trends undermined their status and they became scapegoats for Britain's economic malaise; the 'winter of discontent' in the last year of the Callaghan government sealed their fate. For Blair, they were symbolic of Old Labour and he was anxious to dissociate New Labour from their influence; as Sampson says, 'he saw little reason to come closer to the unions, which got in the way of his plans for modernisation and were always liable to scare away middle-class voters and business supporters.'[32] Structural changes in employment also weakened the trade unions, especially as employers took advantages of the Conservative governments' trade union legislation, and between 1979 and 1997 trade union membership fell by seven million.

The prevalent interpretation of trade union power and influence is one of 'decline' within, for example, a 'marketised society in which emphasis is placed upon the optimisation of individual needs in the market'.[33] There is reason for this interpretation, of course, but it rests upon the stark contrast between their present position and the high watermark of their power in the 1970s when they were probably as powerful and influential as trade unions have ever been in any liberal democracy. But trade unions are still the largest independent organisations in the civil society. Trade union membership stands at about 30 per cent of the workforce – a much higher density than in many other countries, including France and the United States. Additionally, they represent broadly a third of the workforce through collective bargaining agreements that extend to non-members. [34]

Moreover, they have continued to play an important political role, very largely defensive, over the past 30 years and still have a residual role in internal Labour party politics and a share of the vote in elections for the party leader and deputy leader. It is true that New Labour in government keeps its distance; and they have been unable to reverse significant aspects of Mrs Thatcher's trade union laws. But as recently as 2004 they negotiated the pre-election Warwick agreement with Labour, securing important protections for workers and improved working conditions. Indeed, they had previously inserted key policies in the government's agenda, including the national minimum wage. Reid argues that emphasis on the distance between them and New Labour overlooks the 'positive long-term contribution of trade unionism' to British democracy. He predicts a possible rise in their future influence because of economic and recruitment trends.[35]

Trade unions also play a important, though fragmented, role in empowering people and strengthening participation

29 Pattie, C., Seyd, P., and Whiteley, P., 'Civic Attitudes and Engagement in Modern Britain,' in *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 56, No. 4, October 2003.

30 http://www.historyandpolicy.org/archive/policy-paper-05.html .

31 Ewing, K. D. (ed.), *The Right to Strike: from the Trade Disputes Act 1906 to a Trade Union Freedom Bill 2006*, Institute of Employment Rights, 2006; Aldcroft, D. H., and Oliver, M. J., *Trade unions and the economy, 1870-2000*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2000; Fraser, W. H., *A History of British Trade Unionism 1700-1998*, Macmillan, Basingstoke 1999.

32 Anthony Sampson, *Who Runs This Place? The Anatomy of Britain in the 21st Century* , John Murray 2004.

33 Quote from Pattie, C., Seyd, P., and Whiteley, P., *Citizenship in Britain: Values, Participation and Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004. The index of this major survey includes only two references to 'trade unions'.

34 http://www.ek.fi/ek_englanti/figures_in_labour_market/latest_fig_in_labour_market/tradeUnionDensityEU.pdf

35 Reid,op cit.

through contributing funds to social causes and campaigns, sponsoring the political education of working people, pursuing work-related activities to assist those in work, and participating in a wide range of national and local campaigns, such as for example, the National Pensioner Convention campaign to restore the earnings link for pensions, the national anti-BNP electoral campaign alongside Searchlight, and numerous other movements. We have already mentioned in passing the role that UNISON has played in Newcastle (see p.20) in combating 'out-sourcing' public services, not only to protect their members' employment and wages, but also as Wainwright observes, to maintain decent standards for users of services, such as home-care. UNISON also took on the private sector at its own game and won a ten-year contract in 2002 for the 'in-house' delivery of the city council's IT and related services, including benefit payments, council tax and debt collection, in face of competition from BT. [36]

Trades union activism can provide a route for marginalised groups into political and social activism, therefore offering the prospect of greater power. Middle aged women of Asian origin were major participants in the Gate Gourmet dispute of 2005 (see p. 31). Rahila Gupta has described how Jayaben Desair, who was previously involved in the Grunwick dispute in 1977, provided an antidote to the 1980s 'favourite media stereotype [of the] "passive" Asian woman who walked five feet behind her man.' Gupta notes that since then 'history has delivered us a surfeit of working-class Asian women heroes at the forefront of actions against poor wages and conditions, union recognition, casualisation and privatisation.' She cites examples such as the Chix bubble gum factory strike in Slough in 1979, the Bursnall strike in Birmingham in 1992, the Hillingdon hospital cleaners' opposition to privatisation in 1995 and the Lufthansa Skychef catering company dispute of 1998, which ran for 17 months making it 'the longest-running in British industrial history.'[37]

Countervailing influences – political parties?

The traditional route through which citizens could seek to exercise political power through being members of and active in one of two major parties is now closed off as their party leaders are focused almost wholly on persuading the public at large (and swing voters in particular) through the intense cultivation of a media image that active members cannot be allowed to endanger by making their own demands and raising the spectre of 'party splits'. Internal 'democratic' processes in both parties are designed to head off 'party activists'. Indeed, both Tony Blair and David Cameron have sought to improve their reputations by taking on their members over one or other party shibboleth. Party members are largely valued as sources of funds and as electoral foot-soldiers,[38] though modern party fundraising and campaigning techniques threaten even this residual role. Other parties with less at stake electorally are able to give their members a greater say broadly in proportion to how near or far they are to gaining power; and these parties may therefore be open to the influence of their members or external groups.

The era of the mass party is over and membership of the more traditional political parties is in long-term decline. This is a trend across western Europe, but it is more pronounced in the UK than elsewhere. A recent study found that mean party membership of the electorate in 20 European democracies was 5 per cent; the UK was at the bottom of the table at 2 per cent.[39] The true figure is almost certainly lower, given that parties are reluctant to reveal their falling memberships. The old two party system is gradually being replaced by a multi-party system. Even at Westminster, there are now eight 'other' opposition parties, as well as independents. There is however a paradox: the grasp on national power of the two major parties has proved to be enduring so far (though there is a prospect of a 'hung' Parliament at the next election); at local level, the picture is more diverse with growing numbers of local authorities with 'no overall control.' Thus there is more space for organisations or communities seeking to influence political parties at local level.

So what kinds of parties do we now have? Political scientists have identified four basic models, each of which gives a recognisable, and valuable, insight into the nature of the beasts as they evolve. First, there is the classic 'mass' party, organised nationally in response to national elections. There is the 'cadre' or 'caucus' party, a loose elite grouping around senior politicians, of a kind that predated mass suffrage and is common

36 Wainwright, op cit.

37 Gupta, R., 'Heroines of the picket', *Guardian*, 27 August 2005.

38 See for example, the arguments of the independent LabOUR Commission, www.labourcommission.org.uk and of the Campaign for Conservative Party Democracy. Gordon Brown has just launched an official Labour Party commission to introduce 'new rights for members to be consulted on policy'. See also Seyd, P., and Whiteley, P., 'British Party Members: An Overview', *Party Politics*, vol.10, No.4, Sage 2004.

39 Mair, P. and Van Biezen I., 'Party Membership in Twenty European Democracies, 1980-2000', *Party Politics*, Vol 7 No. 1, 2001, pp. 5-21.

around the world. In *The Rise of the British Presidency* Michael Foley identifies a tendency called 'leadership stretch' which seems to give a British twist to this paradigm.[40] Increasingly, he argues, leaders of political parties have taken on 'presidential' characteristics, building up leadership cults around themselves. As a consequence collective institutions such as the cabinet and parties have been minimised in importance and leaders – whether in government or opposition – have tried to appeal direct to the electorate via the media, bypassing mediating bodies. He traces such behaviour at least as far back as Harold Wilson but has argued it became more pronounced from Margaret Thatcher onwards, with Tony Blair taking it to a new level.

There is the 'catch-all' party, which seeks to draw on diverse sources of support, as in the USA – a model that seems apposite in relation to the New Labour project. There is the 'cartel' party without a large membership which cleaves close to the state for political and financial support (this model is now a common feature of British politics; political parties are subsidised directly and indirectly by the national and local state to a far greater extent than is acknowledged).[41] Another way of analysing and understanding the nature of the modern political party has been advanced by Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond. They identify 15 'species' of party using three criteria. They are: the nature of the party's organisation (thick/thin, elite-based or mass-based, etc.); the programmatic orientation of the party (ideological, particularistic-clientele-oriented, etc.); and tolerant and pluralistic (or democratic) versus proto-hegemonic (or anti-system).[42]

Party members do have some influence even within the Conservative and Labour parties. First, they do have a say in the election of the leader (and the deputy leader in the case of the Labour Party), always provided that there is an election. The parliamentary parties in both cases are supposed to act as filters, giving MPs a degree of influence. However, Conservative members were able to force Iain Duncan Smith upon a reluctant parliamentary party in 2001; and it was Cameron's appeal to party members that swung Conservative MPs behind him in 2005. Local party members can select and de-select MPs (and though they may be leaned on by the centre, such interference can backfire); and it may be the case that leaders will defer to their wishes on certain policies which they hold dear (sometimes as a trade-off for adopting other less popular measures). For instance, Blair finally gave way, partially, to his party's commitment to a ban on fox-hunting, and Cameron has stumbled over party opposition to his retreat from a continuing commitment to grammar schools. On the big issues however party leaders can and do prevail over what their members wish. Some of the strongest resistance to Blair's most prominent political decision, to join the invasion of Iraq, came from within the Labour Party – from party members and MPs (including the two largest parliamentary rebellions in history). Yet this was the party of government that nonetheless implemented the policy.

There are many other perspectives on the place and role of political parties in modern society. Geoff Mulgan, a former head of policy at 10 Downing Street, for example has imported a concept from engineering, distinguishing 'strong power and weak power controls' to describe social changes he argues are taking place. Strong power controls use 'large quantities of energy relative to the processes they control, while weak power controls use very little'.[43] Mulgan suggests that '[t]he era of strong power political institutions' – in particular mass, hierarchical parties – 'may now be coming to an end, at least in the advanced industrialized countries'; and that weak power structures – such as the 'women's and environmental movements' – are more attuned to the times. Their advantage being that they 'have usually been organized as horizontal networks, without the need for a single programme, a single leadership, a hierarchy of officials and committees.'[44]

Helen Margetts posits a further model for the political party, that of the 'cyber party', which organises on the internet and has supporters rather than formal members, who possess multiple preferences and lend their support according to context.[45]

Power and the Internet

The internet – the giant global meeting place and library – is changing the world. It has had a far-reaching and growing impact on governmental, corporate and media communications in the UK and has greatly expanded their influence. Survey evidence indicates that use of the internet reflects the inequalities of British society. There is a 'digital divide'

40 Foley, M., *The Rise of the British Presidency* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1993).

41 See: Katz, R. and Mair, P. (eds.) Party Organizations: a Data Handbook on Party Organizations in Western Democracies 1960-90 (Sage, London, 1992).

42 Gunther, R. and Diamond, L., 'Species of Political Parties: A New Typology', *Party Politics*, Vol 9, No. 2, 2003, pp167-99.

43 Mulgan, G., *Politics in an Antipolitical Age* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994), p.116.

44 Mulgan, G., *Politics in an Antipolitical Age* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994), p.124.

45 Margetts, H., 'The Cyber Party', paper to School of Public Policy, University College London, 2001.

between the haves and have-nots: internet users are younger, more highly educated and richer than non-users, and more likely to be men than women and more likely to live in London and the south-east than elsewhere. [46]

Yet its ability to link groups and individuals and to facilitate joint action plainly has great potential for those who seek to organise wider participation in public and social life, especially if it can be placed as a tool in the hands of disadvantaged groups. Joe Trippi, a US campaign manager, has described the Howard Dean presidential campaign that organised 600,000 activists in 2004 as 'the first shot' of a revolution, 'a digital reawakening of democracy'.[47] What then are the implications of widespread use of the internet for power relations and participation? We return first to Dowding's resource-based account of power in which actors are powerful because of the resources they bring to a bargain with others and the resources he identified as being important in determining an actor's power (see p.15 above).

The ability to form groups is crucial to the acquisition of power: social power always depends upon a coalition of interests. As we have discussed, some groups (particularly those lacking in these resources) are particularly vulnerable to *collective action problems*, and are unlikely to form. (The unemployed constitute a classic example of a so called 'latent' pressure group, that is large but geographically dispersed, heterogeneous and short of any of the above resources; yet interestingly, there is no 'digital divide' in internet use between people in or out of work. [48]) Use of the internet clearly has the potential to influence significantly the capacity of 'ordinary' citizens and weaker social or political groups to gain information and expertise; and we can reasonably assume that it aids building a positive rather than negative reputation. [49]

First, with respect to *information and expertise*, the internet and growing world-wide web vastly increases the range of *information* that is freely available to any internet user, on virtually any subject imaginable but certainly political information.[50] Before the rise of search engines in the early 2000s, it was often argued that meaningful information was difficult to find, like looking for a book in an uncatalogued library – but search engines have revolutionised our ability to seek information, and organisations that seek and strategise to be visible generally can make themselves so. Survey evidence suggests that by 2007, nearly two thirds of internet users would 'go to the internet first' to find out the name of their MP if they didn't know it already. [51] With respect to *expertise* also, it is possible to argue that the internet provides new possibilities for individuals to acquire professional expertise in specific areas. This development is particularly marked in health where an ordinarily educated but skilled internet user can become an expert on a given complaint or illness, challenge the views of health professionals and gain knowledge from and ally with other people in the same situation. The capacity of the internet to segment populations into groups such as these, with similar interests, however geographically or socially dispersed, is an increasingly valuable resource.

With respect to *reputation*, the internet provides the possibility for individuals or groups to acquire reputation in ways that circumvent traditional methods such as print and broadcast media or elite networks. So, for example, sites like *You Tube* (the video-sharing web site) or *My Space* (the home-page creation web site) have acquired billions of users in only a couple of years largely by 'word of mouth' – or at least, via millions of communications carried out via online social contacts [52]. The characteristics of network structures make the creation of reputation via network contacts (as opposed to broadcast media) far easier. Researchers have shown that the world-wide web exhibits 'small world characteristics', which means that any two pages are connected via a surprisingly small number of links.[53] In this 'small-world', linkages between clusters within networks have the potential to transform the nature of political communication, meaning that news about events, groups or individuals can spread incredibly quickly. Once a phenomenon, group (or individual) has acquired a certain reputation then traditional media may help to enlarge it, but neither media prominence nor advertising is necessary to reach such a level.

46 See for example, Gardner, J., and Oswald, A., 'Internet use: the digital divide', in Park, A., et al, *British Social Attitudes: the 18th Report*, National Centre for Social Research/Sage, 2001.

47 Trippi, J., 'Democracy reborn, digitally', *Sunday Times*, 10 June 2007.

48 Gardner and Oswald, op cit.

49 For a fuller discussion, see Hood, C., and Margetts, H., *The Tools of Government in the Digital Age*, Palgrave 2007.

50 Bimber, B., *Information and American Democracy: technology in the evolution of political* power, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002.

51 Helsper, E., and Dutton, W., *The Internet in Britain from 2003 to 2007*, Oxford Internet Surveys, Oxford Internet Institute, Oxford 2007.

52 See (*My Space*), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/6034577/stm and (*You Tube*), http://news,bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4782118.stm

53 See Albert, R., Jeong, H., and Barabasi, A-L , 'Diameter of the World-Wide Web', *Nature*, vol. 401, September 1999; and Watts, D. J., and Strogatz, S.H., '*Collective dynamics of "small-world" networks*', *Nature*, vol. 393, pp. 440-442, 1998.

For this reason, entry costs for smaller political parties and organisations are far lower than in the off-line world.

Turning to collective action problems, the internet seems to reduce the costs of *collective action* since information and reputation are the resources most needed to facilitate collective action. The internet also helps to work against heterogeneity, an element of the collective action problem identified by Keith Dowding,[54] given its capacity to aid the identification of people with shared interests and preferences across geographical boundaries (e.g., diasporas, international terrorists or people with multiple sclerosis). It also aids group interactiveness, shrinking coordination problems caused by size and geographical dispersion; indeed, many protests, particularly international ones such as anti-globalisation demonstrations, are now organised almost entirely on-line. The internet also promotes visibility.

The most recent developments in web-based technologies further facilitate the formation of groups and the overcoming of the collective action problem. Loosely described as 'Web 2.0' such applications enable users of web sites to generate content and to create or participate in 'on-line communities'. The social networking sites (like *My Space*, *Facebook*, *Second Life*, *You Tube* and *Flickr*), where video clips and photos can be posted and shared, demonstrate the potential for other groups to set up and grow networks of like-minded people, sharing information and images.

So if some of the resources at the root of power relations are easier to acquire in the on-line world, while some of the traditional problems of group formation are reduced, what are the social and political implications? Obviously, not everyone is a skilled internet user or even has access to the internet at all, so the effect of differential rates of internet usage and penetration on any shift in power relations have to be considered. Around 65 per cent of UK citizens have access to the internet. However, such a figure does not necessarily mean that the remaining 35 per cent are excluded from the resources to which the internet gives access. Survey evidence suggests that around 70 per cent of non-internet users could 'probably' or 'definitely' get someone to use the internet on their behalf if they needed to, suggesting that less than 10 per cent of the population are completely excluded from on-line resources.[55]

Secondly, the internet has a differential effect on different types of actor. The difference it makes to the state, or government, and therefore the ability of citizens and social groups to influence what the state does is of great importance to our interest in its potential contribution to widening and deepening citizen participation. Research suggests that the British state tends to be less innovative than private sector organisations or social groups in terms of developing an on-line presence and maximising 'nodality' – that is, being at the centre of social and informational networks and having capacity to disseminate and collect information. [56] In the traditional world, government is in a privileged position in terms of nodality – the collection and dissemination of information; but in the online world, others are able to challenge government nodality.[57]

In Dowding's terms, nodality might be viewed as a combination of reputation and information; and so for those citizens who expand their reputation and information environment successfully, the internet allows new possibilities for influencing state organisations. For example, in 2006 No. 10 Downing Street introduced a new facility on their web site allowing citizens to set up on-line petitions. This application was used by the individual Peter Roberts to set up a petition against the policy of vehicle tracking and road pricing, which attained 1.8 million signatures by the deadline of 20 February 2007. [58]Tony Blair, then the Prime Minister, was moved by the blaze of publicity that accompanied this petition to write to all 1.8 million signatories, which must have been the largest mass email by a government ever to take place. Although the petition will of course not necessarily change government policy, it has certainly raised the reputation of the 'no' case and has caused the government to invest resources in raising its own nodality.

Some characteristics of the on-line world mean that pre-internet patterns of power and influence are reinforced on-line. With respect to information, 'the media-rich get richer', as the American political scientist Bruce Bimber put it, on observing that those likely to access print or televised political news are more likely to access such information on-line. [59] With respect to reputation, there is a strong argument that there is a 'winner-takes-all' effect – that

54 See Dowding, K., *Power*, op cit.

55 Oxford Internet Surveys 2005 and 2007: Dutton, W. and Helsper, E.,*The Internet in Britain: Oxford Internet Survey Report 2007*; and Dutton, W. and di Gennaro, C., *The Internet in Britain: Oxford Internet Survey 2005 Report*, Oxford Internet Institute, Oxford, 2005 and 2007

56 See Hood, C., and Margetts, H., op cit. 2007, for a full discussion of their term, 'nodality'.

57 Escher, T., Margetts, H., Petricek, V. ,and Cox, I., 'Governing from the Centre? Comparing the Nodality of Digital Governments' paper to the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, September 2006.

58 http://bbc.news.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6349027.stm

59 Bimber, op cit.

is, as a network gets larger, a site is more likely to link to a site that has a large number of links. This hypothesis has been disproved in some areas, but at the simplest level, a web site with more links coming into it is more likely to be visible to search engines (who use the number of links in part as a proxy for popularity) and therefore more likely to be linked to in the future.

Thus, in conclusion, the internet provides ordinary citizens with new potential for acquiring some of the resources that lead to power, notably information, expertise and reputation. It can also aid group formation, through the reduction of problems traditionally associated with collective action. A key implication of this potential is that non-state actors can become more powerful vis-à-vis state actors, which tend to suffer a net loss of nodality in the on-line world.

Such potential however, can be distributed inequitably, given that different internet users use the internet for different purposes; that internet use is unequal; and that some citizens do not use the internet at all. Furthermore, as on-line networks increase in size some actors acquire disproportionately greater resources while others lose visibility. Any endeavour to use the internet to re-balance power relations and enhance participation must take account of these inequities.

Part 4 Participation in civil society

In Part 4, we consider first the structures that create inequalities in resources and power and lead to social exclusion and middle class hegemony. We describe which groups in society make use of the opportunities for participation and analyse the significance of associational life. We then describe 'citizen action', a remarkably buoyant phenomenon, and participation in closed, invited and claimed/created spaces. Part 4 ends with some observations on citizen action.

Inequalities in resources and power

It has long been the government's goal to 'win the battle' against poverty, especially child poverty, but there is no government strategy or target in place to reduce major inequalities in income and wealth – a strategy that would at least open up the way to wider participation. Yet gross inequalities in income and wealth spawn the inequalities across society in health, education, housing, employment and local environments – and of course deepen social exclusion for poor and marginalised individuals and communities. The traditional view is that taxing the rich more heavily would yield only negligible gains for public services, but this argument now requires re-examination with the advent of the 'super rich' under turbo-capitalism.[1] Certainly, New Labour's deference to corporate interests (see p.25) and the 'relaxed' tax regime for the 'super rich' and business, coupled with the political parties' concentration on the interests of 'middle England' and 'the centre', inhibit policies that could re-balance life chances between the middle and skilled worker classes and the bulk of the working class and give working class people in general more opportunities to participate in the policies that affect their lives (see 'Who participates', p.52). Moreover the rich and very rich do have immediate impacts on the life chances of the majority.[2]

Poverty and social exclusion

Poverty breeds social exclusion and social exclusion breeds powerlessness. [3] Millions of people live in poverty in the UK. Poverty levels began to fall after 1997-98 but inequality in incomes has increased and in 2003-04 was more or less unchanged from the situation in 1996-97 and remains at historically high levels.[4] Arguably, income inequality would be even greater without a series

1 For the traditional view, see Giddens, A., *Over to You, Mr Brown*, Polity 2007; for a re-think, see Wilby. P., 'Is greed good for us?' (review of Peston, R., *Who Runs Britain? How the Super Rich are Changing Our Lives*, Hodder and Stoughton, 2008), Guardian Review, 2 February 2008.

2 For example, in the housing market; see Barker, K., *Delivering Stability: Securing Our Future Housing Needs*, TSO March 2004.

3 Weir, S., *Unequal Britain: a human rights route to social justice*, Politico's 2006

4 Brewer, M., Goodman, A., Myck, M., Shaw, J., and Shephard, A., *Poverty and Inequality in Britain: 2004*, Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2004.

of pro-poor budgets and Gordon Brown's 'passive redistribution strategies' as Chancellor. [5] But such measures have halted a rise in inequality in incomes rather than directly reducing it. In 2003-04, the poorest fifth of the population received 5.9 per cent of total income while the richest fifth got 43.6 per cent, more than seven times as much.[6] Wealth inequality is even greater than income inequality and is increasing. [7]

European-wide figures published in 2004 confirmed that the UK was the fourth most unequal society across the EU-15 in 2004 and more unequal than six of the ten new member states.[8]

In a 1998 report on neighbourhood renewal, the Social Exclusion Unit informed the Prime Minister that 'Over the last generation, this has become a more divided country. While most areas have benefited from rising living standards, the poorest neighbourhoods have tended to become more rundown, more prone to crime, and more cut off from the labour market.'[9] A following report in 2004 noted that, 'The risks of social exclusion are not evenly shared but concentrated in the poorest individuals and communities'; and further, that:

'Children's life chances are still strongly affected by the circumstances of their parents. The social class a child is born into and their parents' level of education and health are still major determinants of their life chances and mean that social exclusion and disadvantage can pass from generation to generation' .[10]

The Unit has expressed concern about the vulnerability of older people to social exclusion:

'Too often this exclusion is compounded by the failure of services to react to the complexity of exclusion in later life. This is why we need a more responsive model for services for older people that addresses these needs.'[11]

Social mobility in Britain is silting up – which means that the poor and their children encounter obstacles in their efforts to make progress, thus deepening exclusion. A 2001 discussion paper cited international comparisons suggesting a link between higher rates of social mobility and more equal incomes. Countries were divided into 'fluid' and 'less fluid' clusters; the UK was in the less fluid category 12 In 2007, LSE researchers for the Sutton Trust reported that Britain and the USA had the lowest rate of social mobility out of eight European and North American countries in a comparative study, identifying again the key role played by class disparities in education. 13Sir Peter Lampl, chairman of the Sutton Trust, said:

'These findings are truly shocking . . . those from less privileged backgrounds are more likely to continue facing disadvantage into adulthood, and the affluent continue to benefit disproportionately from educational opportunities.'

Social divisions such as these, along with those of gender and race, profoundly affect the distribution of power in the UK. It has long been recognised that the formal civil and political equality on which democracy is based in principle does not in practice bring about equality in power. [14] Democratic Audit's framework for auditing democracy, now made universal under the auspices of the intergovernmental body, International IDEA (the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance), regards socio-economic rights as one of the pillars of democracy. [15] People who are less privileged economically and socially are less able to participate fully in democratic society.[16] The concept of social exclusion, now recognised by the European Union, rests on the perception that groups and individuals suffering from multiple disadvantages are denied full citizenship – and with it, power. [17] Further, the American sociologist Hilary Silver has identified what she describes as a 'European left paradigm of social exclusion', in which social exclusion 'entails the interplay of class, status and political power and serves the interests of the included'. 'Powerful groups, often with distinctive cultural identities and institutions . . . restrict access of outsiders to valued resources through a process of "social closure."'[18]

5 Hirsch, D., 'Trends in poverty and inequality', *Prospect*, May 2004.

6 Child Poverty Action Group, *Key Findings from the 2003/04 Households Below Average Income Series,* 2005; www.cpag.org.uk/info/briefings_policy.htm

7 H.M Revenue and Customs, *Personal Wealth*, (Series C) Table 13.5, 2004.

8 Dennis, I, and Guio, A, *Monetary Poverty in New Member States and Candidate Countries,* Statistics in focus, Population and Social conditions, 12/2004, European Communities 2004a.

9 Social Exclusion Unit, *Bringing Britain together: a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal*, Cm 4045, TSO 1998.

10 Social Exclusion Unit, *Breaking the Cycle: Taking stock of progress and priorities for the future*, 2004.

11 See Social Exclusion Unit, *A Sure Start to Later Life: Ending Inequalities for Older People*, 2006.

12 Aldridge, *Social Mobility*, op cit.

13 Blanden, J., Gregg, P., and Machin, S., *Intergenerational Mobility in Europe and North America*, Sutton Trust 2007.

14 Miliband, R., *The State in Capitalist Society*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969.

15 See Beetham, D., Byrne, I., Ngan, P., and Weir, S., *Democracy under Blair*, Politico's, 2002 and Beetham, D., et al, *The International Handbook on Democracy Assessment*, International IDEA/Kluwer Law International, The Hague, 2002; see also http://www.democraticaudit.com/auditing_democracy/index.php .

16 Weir, S., *Unequal Britain: human rights as a route to social justice*, Politico's, 2006

17 See further, Lee, P., and Murie, A., *Literature Review of Social Exclusion*, Scottish Office, Edinburgh, 1999; and Gore, C., 'Markets, citizenship and social exclusion' in Rodgers, G., Gore, C. and Figueiredo, J. (eds), *Social Exclusion: Rhetoric, Reality, Responses* (International Institute for Labour Studies/United Nations Development Programme, Geneva, 1995).

18 Silver, H., 'Reconceptualizing social disadvantage: Three paradigms of social exclusion', in *Social Exclusion: Rhetoric, Reality, Responses*, International Institute for Labour Studies/UNDP, Geneva 1995.

Towards middle class hegemony

Most poor people are members of the working class, though they may also be disadvantaged through their gender, ethnic identity, age or dependence on the state. As well as being less powerful as individuals, the collective political strength of what can be termed the 'working class' on which the poorer people in the UK were once able to rely has ebbed away as it has shrunk numerically. Well into the 20th century, political calculations on both left and right assumed the presence of a growing or at least stable manual working class. That assumption no longer holds good. [19] In what is now a far more complex society, the sociologist John Goldthorpe has set out the following range of social class divisions under the 'salariat system': [20]

Higher salariat	12 per cent
Lower salariat	16 per cent
Routine clerical	24 per cent
Petty bourgeoisie	7 per cent
Foremen and technicians	5 per cent
Skilled manual	11 per cent
Unskilled manual	25 per cent

Thus manual workers make up just 36 per cent of the population and are outnumbered by the middle class and aspiring groups (64 per cent).

According to Dowding, evidence that a particular group's interests are being furthered does not prove that they are powerful. They may just be lucky. The real test of their power is how they respond to the mobilisation of contrary interests, and 'the evidence prior to that response is the resources they are known to have at their disposal.'[21] The available evidence suggests the middle classes in Britain have substantial resources and may be both lucky and powerful, in a latent and reactive sense. The structure of the welfare state has proved enormously beneficial to them; politicians pander to their needs; and they are able to mobilise against perceived threats. The 'beneficial involvement' thesis, advanced by Robert E. Goodin and Julian Le Grand, describes how the middle classes benefit substantially from the welfare state. [22] Their analysis begins with how in 'some of the standard interpretations of the purposes of welfare programmes, the non-poor are officially not meant to benefit directly from them.' Yet they found that 'the non-poor nonetheless play a crucial role in (variously) creating, expanding, sustaining, reforming and dismantling the welfare state.' In some instances 'the motives of the non-poor are wholly altruistic.' But it was far more common 'for the non-poor to play all these various roles in the affairs of the welfare state with an eye to their own direct benefit.' Le Grand writes,

> 'There was a time when many people in Britain believed that state provision of such services as health care, education, housing, even transport, free or at heavily subsidized prices, would in itself be a significant contribution to redistributing income to the poorest members of the community. Inequalities would diminish and a classless society would be a little nearer attainment. These dreams were not fulfilled'.

Instead, most of these services actually benefit the middle classes at least as much as the poor, and in many cases more than the poor.[23] He points out that public spending tended to be on services that the middle classes used more, and that the imbalance of benefits reaped from the social services was even greater, once again in favour of the middle classes.[24] In the view of Goodin and Le Grand, 'beneficial involvement' by the non-poor in public services is inevitable and there is 'little scope' for egalitarian remedies.

The Goodin-Le Grand thesis is widely shared. For example, Fred C. Pampel and John B. Williamson explain that 'democratic processes offer the means for a variety of groups to influence public policy in their favour'. Thus politically driven welfare spending is not directed to those most in need, but rather reflects, in part, the political strength of other groups and has minimal effects on equality. [25]

The lesson that Goodin, Le Grand and others draw from their analysis is that egalitarians who seek greater social justice should examine ways of correcting 'the primary income distribution' rather than trying to 'patch up' and reform welfare distribution. [26] But here again middle class power and 'luck' prove to be an obstacle for politicians in the major political parties, including the Labour Party that has traditionally been the repository of working class interests. In the wake of Labour's 1992 election defeat, the fourth in a row, David Piachaud, an expert on social administration and previously an adviser to Labour governments of the 1970s, wrote:

> 'there is now virtually no

19 Jacques, M., and Mulhern, F. (eds), *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* New Left Books, 1981.

20 Jones, B., *Dictionary of British Politics*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2004.

21 Dowding, K., *Rational Choice and Political Power* (Edward Elgar, Aldershot, 1991), p.114.

22 Goodin, R. and Le Grand, J. (eds), *Not Only the Poor: The Middle Classes and the Welfare State*, Allen & Unwin 1987.

23 Le Grand, J., 'The Middle-Class Use of the British Social Services' in Goodin, R. and Le Grand, J. (eds), op cit.

24 Le Grand, J., 'The Middle-Class Use of the British Social Services' in Goodin, R. and Le Grand, J. (eds), op cit.

25 Pampel, F. and Williamson, J., *Age, class, politics, and the welfare state*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989.

26 Goodin, R. and Le Grand, J. (eds), *Not Only the Poor: The Middle Classes and the Welfare State*, op cit.

likelihood of further substantial redistribution of income through taxes and social security benefits. This is not because any further redistribution is impossible or undesirable; rather it is based on a judgement of what is politically feasible.'[27]

Rising stars within Labour took note. A key restraint on any egalitarian designs Labour still had has been the determination to retain the support of the middle classes. Blair's political strategist, Philip Gould, held fast to the view that 'we had to reach out to the middle classes.'[28] This group was 'the great majority of our population and the great majority of the coalition Labour needed to build to win power.'[29] Thus New Labour's huge investment in the NHS and education was targeted on those services from which the middle classes most benefit; at the same time, the Blair governments presided over a severe and growing shortage of affordable housing (a situation the Prime Ministers has pledged to reverse).[30]

The prospects for 'primary redistribution' within an increasingly aspirational society are not good. In a lecture given in 2000, Frank Field MP, a long-term campaigner for a more equal society, argued that a substantial proportion of the working and lower middle classes had for the first time incomes that gave them 'real choices'. In these circumstances, such people 'rarely look to those below them'. They associate themselves increasingly with the aspirations common to those 'higher up the social hierarchy'.[31] In this way, the power of the middle classes expands downwards. Meanwhile, they retain a significant ability to mobilise against threats. In many areas, for example, they are able to dominate entry to more successful state secondary schools by buying into homes in their catchment areas. In February 2007, the local education authority in Brighton and Hove announced plans to introduce lotteries for secondary school places. As BBC News reported, middle class parents formed a vigorous protest group, Schools4Communities, fearing that their children would lose their places in the more popular schools.[32]

The right-wing press, ever vigilant to protect what newspapers like the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and *Telegraph* (both daily and Sunday) perceive as the interests of the middle class, were quick to seize upon such a threat to the privileged position they often occupy in state secondary school education. The prospect of school places being awarded by lottery endangered the middle-class right to buy into a good school's catchment area. The *Mail on Sunday* proclaimed:

'The idea of selection by lottery is an arbitrary gamble. It also teaches children the demotivating lesson that hard work does not have a reward. The laziest competitor is just as likely to win the lottery for a school place as the most hard-working.'[33]

The *Telegraph* cried out: 'The life-chances of our children, already crippled by the bigotry against grammar schools and the mountain of debt that must be climbed to attend even one of our Mickey Mouse universities, are now to be reduced to a raffle.'[34]

So it was hardly surprising that the announcement shortly afterwards by David Cameron and David Willets that the Conservatives would not support the extension of grammar schools met with a stronger response still. *The Sunday Express* stated that Cameron 'must learn that those who want a Tory government believe grammars offer children an excellent education and the chance of a better future'[35]; while the *Telegraph* commissioned a poll which it claimed showed that 'More than twice as many voters – and five times as many Conservative supporters – back an education system based around grammar schools than any other single option.'[36]

Economic, social and cultural inequalities

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has protested in both of its last reports (in 1997 and 2002) on the United Kingdom that 'despite the protection of laws and elaborate machinery' significant de facto discrimination exists against women, blacks and other ethnic minorities – and especially the 'marginalised and vulnerable' among the ethnic minorities – and people with disabilities in the most important spheres of life.[37]

Women have historically suffered systemic exclusions from the major spheres of economic, political, social and much cultural life in British society, and of course, globally. Feminism and the women's movement have begun processes to reverse this historic

27 Piachaud, D., *What's wrong with Fabianism?* Fabian Pamphlet 558, Fabian Society, 1993.

28 Gould, P., *The Unfinished Revolution: How the Modernisers Saved the Labour Party*, Little, Brown 1998.

29 Gould, P., op cit.

30 See further, Byrne, I., and Blick, A., 'Home truths' in Weir, S., *Unequal Britain: human rights as a route to social justice*, Politico's, 2006

31 Field, F., *Making Welfare Work: The Politics of Reform*, (Stevenson Lecture), University of Glasgow, Glasgow, 2000.

32 See http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/

33 Rees-Mogg, W., 'How dare they gamble with children's lives', *Mail on* Sunday, 4 March 2007.

34 Booker, C., 'Blair's 'choice' for parents – a lottery', *Daily Telegraph*, 3 March 2007.

35 'Tories wrong on grammars', *Express on Sunday*, 20 May 2007.

36 Wilson, G., 'Backlash as poll shows 70 per cent of Tory voters support grammars', *Daily Telegraph*, 18 May 2007

37 Weir, S., *Unequal Britain*, op cit.

exclusion through their own efforts and both the state and in civil society. The 1970 Equal Pay Act, the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act and the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission are three landmarks of state intervention; EU laws have also made a substantial difference, especially in employment. The available research [38] points in some respects to substantial improvements in the social status of women in the past 30 years. Educationally, girls out-perform boys and women's employment has increased from about 60 to 70 per cent since 1975, but their presence in employment does not match their educational performance: the gender pay gap between men and women stands at 17.1 per cent for full-time work and 38.4 per cent for part-time work; women are over-represented in low-paid work and under-represented in senior and managerial positions (only 34 per cent of managers and senior officials are women; only 17 per cent of directors and chief executives of major organisations, earning on average £56,000 a year, are women). Eight out of nine university vice chancellors are men; nine out of ten senior police officers are men; three out of four senior civil servants are men; and eight or nine out of ten senior judges are men. Despite Mrs Thatcher's recent pre-eminence, few women really carry weight in Westminster politics; fewer than one in five MPs are women. [39] (The ratio of women to men in the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly of Wales is higher, at 40 and 50 per cent respectively, reflecting positive action policies by some political parties.)

Nearly 12 per cent of the population in Britain is from an ethnic minority; and 8.1 per cent is non-white. The data on social exclusion and disadvantage among some ethnic minorities are shocking. Some ethnic groups are significantly more at risk of being poor than other groups in British society, suffering particularly from low employment rates and high unemployment. [40] Overall, ethnic minority workers are disproportionately more liable to be out of work and less likely than their white counterparts to be promoted when they are in work; ethnic minority women, especially those of Bangladeshi or Pakistani origin, suffer worst from unemployment. Well-qualified graduates experience discrimination in obtaining managerial or professional work and progress more slowly in their careers than less well-qualified white graduates. These inequalities are multiplied in education, housing and health.[41]

A large body of research shows that the 'ethnic penalty' persists in British society, even though a statutory framework is in place to prevent race (and faith) discrimination, dating back to the 1965 Race Relations Act. In 2004-05 3,080 complaints of racial discrimination were lodged with employment tribunals. The ethnic penalty reaches into political life. For example, there are only 13 ethnic minority MPs. In the civil service ethnic minority staff make up 8.2 per cent of the total, but account for only 3.3 per cent of senior staff.

The balance of power

This brief discussion of the shift in the balance of power and influence between the social classes and the disadvantages that women, ethnic minorities and others encounter throws up important questions for the future of political power and participation in the UK. As we shall see in the next section, these inequalities create inequalities in the patterns of associational life and participation in Britain.

Keith Dowding suggests that certain groups, among them the economically disadvantaged, face pronounced difficulties in mobilising in order to exercise power, even if other groups do not act against them. He states 'Groups have differential abilities to mobilize, based upon properties of the group, not upon the opposition of other groups.'[42] Even before they face 'explicit opposition' they may be powerless, since:

> 'first they have to overcome their own collective action problem. How that problem is structured may depend upon deliberate actions of powerful individuals and organizations in the past but not necessarily upon action on the part of the powerful today. Rather those who benefit from others' collective action problems are lucky.'

Once less powerful people do mobilise, they 'may then face opposition from those whose interests are threatened'.[43] In an interview with Dowding, he said that technological developments, such as the internet (see above), offer a possible means of helping to overcome the 'collective action problem', though he is not overly optimistic. He is more sceptical still about proposals for institutional reform and the devices of 'deliberative democracy', such as citizens' juries. In his view

38 See in particular the soon-to-be-merged Equal Opportunities Commission: http://www.eoc.org.uk/Default.aspx?page=0 .

39 For a fuller survey, see Beetham, D., et al, *Democracy under Blair: a Democratic Audit of Britain*, ch. 11, 2002.

40 See, for instance, a report by the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit of 2003, *Ethnic Minorities and the Labour Market: Final Report*, London: Cabinet Office (2003): http://www.emetaskforce.gov.uk/reports.asp .

41 See Weir, S., *Unequal Britain*, op cit.

42 Dowding, K., *Power*, Open University Press, Buckingham, 1996.

43 Dowding, K., *Rational Choice and Political Power*, Edward Elgar, Aldershot, 1991.

such devices, now being widely practiced to facilitate greater participation, may serve to enhance the power of the middle class further and are a way to 'avoid facing up' to the basic inequalities in power that derive from the unequal distribution of 'material things'.

Who participates?

Amidst general concerns about the decline in civic citizenship and premonitions of 'apathy' among the British population, there is often a note of optimism centring on the levels of participation and political activity, associational life and 'social capital' in the UK. Contrary to claims of political inactivity, the Citizen Audit in 2000 found that 'people frequently participate in activities designed to influence political outcomes'.[44] The *18th British Social Attitudes* survey for the same year indicates that associational life in the UK has been 'relatively stable'; and as about one in four people are members of organisations, social capital shows no signs of being in decline.[45] But which segments of society participate? Who gains from the 'tangible' benefits of social capital? How far are the inequalities in resources and power that we have noted above perpetuated in civil society, associational life and political participation?

Variations in political participation

But first, what proportion of the public participate for political ends and what forms does their participation take? The Citizen Audit conducted a survey to discover what actions people took or would take 'to influence rules, laws or practice', giving them a choice between 7different acts of political participation, from giving donations to an organisation, voting in local elections and signing a petition to contacting a politician or the media, taking part in a legal or illegal protest or going on strike.[46] More than three quarters of the respondents had engaged in one or more of these activities over the previous 12 months, and one in three had taken five or more actions. (A Home Office Citizenship survey in 2001 found that 38 per cent had taken part in political actions over the past 12 months, but respondents were given only five choices and voting was not among them.[47]) The authors noted the 'individualistic' nature of the most common actions; and more collective actions (acting together in a demonstration, political meeting, strike or illegal protest, or forming a group) were less common.

Table 1: Variations in political participation

No. of political actions	0 (%)	1-4 (%)	5 plus (%)
All	15	52	33
Class			
Professional and managerial	8	45	47
Intermediate	14	51	36
Manual	18	58	24
Household income			
Under £10,000	19	56	25
£50,000 and over	3	43	54
Time in education			
15 years and under	19	57	24
16-18	15	52	33
19 years and over	7	43	50
Ethnicity			
White European	15	52	34
Black/Asian/ Caribbean/other	18	56	26

Source: adapted from Pattie et al, op cit, Table 3.4, 2000:86

The *British Social Attitudes* survey in 2000 asked people what actions they would undertake if Parliament were considering a law that they thought was 'really unjust and harmful' and secondly, what actions they had ever undertaken in response to an unjust and harmful government action. Nearly a third of respondents said that would take three or more actions from a list that they were offered; and 16 per cent said that they would go on a demonstration or protest, a figure twice as high as it was when this question was first asked in 1983. As to what people have actually done, just over half the respondents reported that they had undertaken at least one action in response to an unjust or harmful government action. Signing a petition was by far and away the most common action (42 per cent), but there has also been a slow but consistent increase over time in the proportion of people who have been on a protest or demonstration (to 10 per cent).[48]

There are however marked biases in which segments of society participate and which do not that reflect the inequalities in resources and power that we have noted in the previous section. The Citizen Audit found that the poorest members of society, manual workers, and those with fewer years in education, are more likely to be politically

44 Pattie, C., Seyd, P., and Whiteley, P., 'Civic Attitudes and Engagement', *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 56, No. 4, October 2003. This article summarises the findings of the ESRC-funded Citizen Audit of 2000, fully reported in Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley, *Citizenship in Britain: Values, Participation and Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004.

45 Johnston, M., and Jowell, R. , 'How robust is British civil society' in Park, A., et al, *British Social Attitudes: the 18th Report,* Sage and National Centre for Social Research, 2001.

46 Pattie, C., Seyd, P., and Whiteley, P., *Citizenship in Britain*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.

47 Prime, D., Zimmick, M., Zurawan, A., *Active Communities: Initial Findings from the 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey,* Home Office 2002.

48 Bromley, C., Curtice, J., and Seyd, B., 'Political engagement, trust and constitutional reform', in Park, A., et al, *British Social Attitudes: the 18th Report,* Sage and National Centre for Social Research, 2001.

inactive while the richest, best educated and professional and managerial people are more likely to be politically active. For example, those with an annual household income of £50,000 or more are twice as likely as those living on less than £10,000 a year to be politically active; and manual workers as twice as likely as professional and managerial workers to have taken no political actions (see Table 1 further). [49]

Associational life and social capital

In this section, we consider associational life – as measured by membership of organisations – and social capital together, since though social capital is a broader phenomenon, belonging to organisations in civil society is the most reliable indicator of its presence and strength. Social capital is broadly defined as 'connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' [50] In the *18th British Social Attitudes* (*BSA*) survey, social researchers Michael Johnson and Roger Jowell reported that people with social capital – that is here, 'stronger links to voluntary organisations' – tend to be more trusting of others, less estranged from government, more willing to fight perceived injustice and more likely to help their fellow citizens. [51] The celebrated American political analyst Robert Putnam has mourned the erosion of social capital and civic engagement in the US in a celebrated work, *Bowling Alone*, [52] but Johnston and Jowell find that there has not been a similar decline in social trust in the UK. 'To a significant – and sustained – extent,' they write in the BSA report, 'British people tend to . . . spend portions of their discretionary time in the service of community goals.'

However, they also found that this activity is unequal and reflects the inequalities in resources and power that we have discussed in the previous section. They write that participation remains concentrated among familiar groups of advantaged people who,

> 'then bolster those advantages in the course of their voluntary "joining" activities. In time, as their social capital (in common with other forms of capital) generates increasing returns, these advantages will tend to be reinforced. This matters for those who are left out, restricting their access to important sources of support, influence and confidence. And it matters, too, for society at large, tending to perpetuate old divisions.'

The *BSA* surveys show that organisational membership has risen from about one in six people to one in four from 1994 to 2000. Some 22 per cent belonged to one or more community organisations, such as Neighbourhood Watch schemes, tenants', resident or parent-teacher associations; broadly as many were members of a trade union or staff association. The Citizen Audit survey found that just four in 10 people were paid up members of an organisation; the mean number of organisations they belonged to was two. Just over half the Citizen Audit respondents belonged to no organisation (the *BSA* figure for non-joiners was 75 per cent). Citizen Audit also measured 'informal', less organised forms of activity; they found that one in three provided some sort of support for people in the community (e.g., shopping for neighbours, visiting old people, etc.) and one in five belonged to an informal network (e.g., pub quiz team, book-reading circle, etc.).

Johnson and Jowell are very clear about the benefits of associational activity, explaining that the opportunities for fellowship and the formation of reciprocal relationships constitute a form of 'capital' that can subsequently be drawn upon. As well as other benefits (group discounts, awards, recognition, 'exclusivity'), [53] they observe that organisations often give their members administrative and social skills, expand their networks and help to build a system of shared norms and mutual trust. Yet they note that membership, and so access to what they describe as the 'tangible' benefits of associational life varies 'very markedly' between different social groups. So who gains? Table 2 overleaf provides an insight into the different levels of citizen 'connectedness' by class, gender and race and some appreciation of one vital aspect of social exclusion: the table shows that participation is plainly higher among 'more powerful segments of society' and thus higher among the middle classes rather than working classes, among whites rather than other races, and among men rather than women. However, the sample of 'other' races was small and very heterogeneous, as the authors point out, and their list of organisations almost certainly omitted many kinds of activity that may be particularly important to minority communities. They point out that, 'Difficult economic and social conditions will inevitably inhibit and discourage social

49 Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley, op cit.

50 Putnam, R. D., *Bowling Alone – the collapse and revival of American community*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 2000

51 Johnston, M., and Jowell, R. ,'How robust is British civil society' in Park, A., et al, *British Social Attitudes: the 18th Report,* Sage and National Centre for Social Research, 2001

52 Putnam, op cit.

53 See Wilson, J. Q., *Political Organizations*, Basic Books, New York 1973.

Table 2: Belonging to community organisations

Group	Percent belonging to community organisations			Percent belonging to countryside organisations		
No of organisations	0	1	2+	0	1	2+
All	76%	18%	6%	83%	13%	5%
Gender						
Men	76%	18%	6%	80%	14%	6%
Women	76%	18%	5%	85%	12%	4%
Ethnic group						
White	76%	19%	6%	82%	13%	5%
Other	84%	14%	2%	98%	2%	-
Social Class						
Professional/employer	68%	20%	12%	70%	20%	11%
Intermediate non-manual	69%	25%	7%	73%	19%	7%
Junior non-manual	74%	21%	5%	70%	20%	11%
Supervisory/skilled manual	81%	16%	3%	90%	8%	2%
Semi-skilled manual	84%	13%	3%	91%	8%	1%
Unskilled manual	84%	12%	4%	92%	5%	3%

Source: Adapted from Johnston and Jowell, the 18th BSA Report, Table 8.12, Sage/NCSR, 2001:191

participation and integration and in turn help to perpetuate social exclusion'. True, but the 2000 Home Office citizenship survey reported that black and Asian people were equally as involved as white people in helping groups and organisations, and more involved in attending them. The discrepancy in findings may be explained by the fact that the ethnic minorities are predominantly involved in their own organisations, as the *BSA* authors suggest.[54]

The gradient in the table is especially steep when it comes to social class. The higher a person's occupational status is, the more likely they are to be 'connected' to other aspects of civil society, 'conferring a kind of double benefit', as Johnston and Jowell remark. Moreover they also found that the higher classes were particularly likely to join 'groups that may serve to protect or buttress their relative social advantage' whereas people in lower-status occupations were consistently less likely to be members of such groups, except for trade union membership [55]

Thus while the overall stock of social capital in Britain seems to be relatively strong and constant, so too is the inequality of its distribution:

> 'If a rich organisational life and strong social trust are indeed powerful social and economic assets and, like other forms of capital, embody advantages that accumulate over time, then significant parts of Britain continue to be strikingly asset-poor'.[56]

Here lies a 'dark side' to social capital. Putnam identifies in *Bowling Alone* 'bonding' social capital that may promote or reinforce unhealthy group identities to the detriment of society, uniting certain segments and excluding others, creating boundaries rather than building connections and perhaps fostering indifference and hostility to 'outsiders'. It is 'bridging' social capital that is good for society at a whole – 'people's connections that cross social divides and help to foster social cohesion'. The authors explored the possibility that a great deal of the social capital to be found in Britain is of the *bonding* variety – that is, bonding for the middle classes but not for others, thus adding the advantages of organisational links to already significant social and economic resources. They found that a 20 per cent sample of rich people, well endowed with social capital, proved to be a highly organised constituency, accounting for nearly a third of all community memberships – among them those which clearly conferred an advantage on their members. For these rich people with significant social and economic resources, their greater organisational connections enlarged and reinforced inequalities in resources and power:

> 'So, to the extent that organised activities tend to 'bond' along class lines rather than 'bridge' across class boundaries, these disparities in participation do matter.'[57]

The Citizen Audit also analysed the differences between joiners and non-joiners and they too found that it was 'the well-educated and well-heeled' who are more likely to be engaged in political and voluntary action. The young and old, women, manual workers, the poor, the less well-educated, and the Scots were less likely to belong to two or more organisations than the middle-aged, men, professional and managerial workers, the rich, the well-educated and those living in the south east of England. The conclusions from the commentary on these data echo those from the *BSA* study:

> '[P]olitical engagement is very

54 See Beetham, et al, *Democracy under Blair*, or a fuller discussion of this issue.

55 Johnston and Jowell, op cit.

56 Johnston and Jowell, op cit.

57 Johnston and Jowell, op cit.

much dominated by the already well-resourced: in other words, the most highly educated, the rich and those from the top occupational echelons. Political voice, therefore, must inevitably take on the sound of protecting the interests of those who already possess the greatest resources';

and,

'people are also extensively networked into various forms of associational life and informal activities . . . as with political engagement, much of this diverse and rich associational activity is dominated by the rich, the well-educated and those from professional and managerial backgrounds.' [58]

Personal and political efficacy

A variety of practical and theoretical explanations for the relative political inactivity of poor and other groups is on offer, but there is no commanding answer. At the nub of the unanswered question are two issues that can at least be partially measured: 'personal efficacy', or people's confidence in their ability to make demands and take effective action; and 'political, or system, efficacy', or people's views about the ability and willingness of the state or authorities to respond to any demands that they may make. Of course, those who feel personally efficacious also tend to be those who feel that the system is efficacious. [59]

Once again, the *British Social Attitudes* surveys present some evidence on both the strength of personal and political efficacy in the UK. Clear majorities of people have always been sceptical about their capacity to exert political influence, so the latest *BSA* report concentrates on those who 'agree strongly' with statements relevant to feelings of personal efficacy. The proportion of those who strongly agree with the view that 'People like me have no say in what the government does' has risen from 14 to 25 per cent from 1974 to 2000; 18 per cent of people strongly agree with a second statement – 'Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on.' Thus the *BSA* survey indicates that something between one in four or five people in this country do not feel a sense of personal efficacy, but this figure is not broken down in terms of class, gender, ethnic origin or age.

As we state above, participation depends in part on people's belief that the state or authorities will respond. The data show clearly that trust in politicians and 'system efficacy' has fallen considerably over the past 30 years, but once again there is no breakdown in terms of the categories above. If we assume that there is some correlation between political trust and 'social trust', then it is likely that those with a higher level of social trust will feel confident about their political influence and will participate; and here the data show that social trust is closely correlated with membership of organisations and with men rather than women, white people rather than other racial groups, and the professional and managerial classes rather than manual workers. [60]

Citizen action

Here we seek to review the experience of citizen action against the background of the theoretical, structural, political and social analysis that precedes it. We consider citizen action through the prism of Gaventa's typology of spaces for potential influence and political participation, examining also the way in which people participate – is their action individual or collective in nature? Is it unstructured or structured through an existing organisation or channel? Is it time-bound or one-off or ongoing through time? Is it reactive or proactive? Our emphasis is on citizens taking action outside existing organisations or channels. But we have also been constrained by our limited resources, especially in relation to the richness and impact of associational activity at all levels.

Our analysis has extended broadly over a range of questions and issues that concern power in the UK and beyond. We regard this wide survey as significant to our main pre-occupation with strengthening citizen action in both 'invited' and 'claimed/created' space at community and individual level, because we need an understanding of how power at all levels and in different manifestations affects, circumscribes and makes possible citizen action and participation. [61] We need also to incorporate in our analysis a wider concept of 'community' than the merely geographic. Communities can cohere from particular or professional interests, medical conditions or a love of beer; they can grow within the spread of social movements; and with the internet especially, a great variety of communities are being born and growing.

The major opening in current politics lies in the government's genuine interest in encouraging and facilitating the engagement of ordinary citizens in the delivery, and to some extent, the design of

58 Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley, op cit.

59 Pattie, C., and Johnston, R., 'Losing the Voters' Trust: Evaluations of the Political System and Voting at the 1997 British General Election', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, No. 3, 2001.

60 Johnston and Jowell, op cit.

61 Gaventa,op cit.

public services. This interest is widely shared, and is not just the theme of the Geoff Mulgans and David Milibands. For example, Hazel Blears, a conventional Labour loyalist (and now in charge of local government), recently wrote a Fabian Society pamphlet in which she argued the case for more community control over services. One of the issues she deals with was the danger that democracy can become the pursuit of an 'established, wealthy minority' – a difficulty that we spell out above. [62] We should consider citizen action and participation against this backdrop and the formidable obstacles, identified above, that stand in the way of wider participation in British society and politics.

Spaces for participation

1. Closed spaces

Closed spaces, within which political actors make decisions behind closed doors often without even the pretence of extending the opportunities for inclusion, abound in governance in the UK. This is not to say for example that the decisions taken at national level do not reflect electoral calculations, the influence of powerful interest groups, media pressures, popular campaigns, focus group results or other external influences. They do – and at all levels of governance. As we have seen, for example, the discussions that lead to the UK's participation in intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) and foreign policy in general are secret. Global institutions and bodies like Nato are opaque. The deliberations of the EU Council of Ministers are confidential. The Butler review found that a 'small number of key Ministers, officials and military officers' provided the 'framework of [government] discussion and decision-making' on war with Iraq in a series of 25 meeting from April 2002 to the invasion, thus limiting wider cabinet discussion and by-passing the concerns of many MPs, the churches and a majority of the public.[63]

2. Invited spaces

Efforts to facilitate participation and to move from closed to 'open' spaces have created what John Gaventa calls 'invited spaces' into which people may be invited to participate as citizens, beneficiaries or users by various kinds of authorities, be they central or local government, supra-national agencies, quasi-governmental bodies or NGOs. Within the UK, such spaces are opening up at every level, from a representative gathering of people at No 10 Downing Street – a kind of super focus group – to citizens' juries, citizen panels, user programmes and other mechanisms by assorted bodies at local level. The aspirations are high; Geoff Mulgan recently wrote that

> 'Public participation could radically improve our quality of life. It can contribute to creating more active citizens, help manage complex problems in public service design and delivery, help build the new relationships and shifts of power required for 21st century governance, and develop individuals' skills, confidence, ambition and vision.'[64]

In such spaces, formal power may be more diffusely shared between authorities and members of the public and groups of citizens or users may be empowered. Organised people's groups or individuals may attempt to use such spaces to engage with the authorities and may even shift from advocacy strategies to collaboration, or more likely, to adopt a mixture of both. On the other hand, it is the authorities that determine the agenda for such openings and they are often seeking consent or its appearance for policies on which they are already decided. Key figures – officials in central government offices, say, or local councillors jealous of their elected status – may limit the opportunities to participate fully, or head off proposals or ideas that they dislike.

Several recent issues reveal a clear disjuncture between the government's commitment to participation and consultation and its commitment to its own policy agendas. To take two examples:

1. To assuage public concerns about plans to introduce GM crops and foodstuffs in the UK, the government organised farm-scale trials and extended an existing voluntary moratorium on commercial planting with the industry.[65] The trials quickly became the primary target for direct action and provoked a wide variety of bodies, such as the Women's Institute, the Townswomen's Guild, the Consumers Association and Country Landowners and whole-food companies, to back a moratorium on GM crops. Supermarkets, restaurants and other businesses and organisations withdrew from GM products; and public opinion polls showed increases in opposition despite a major public relations campaign. The government inaugurated

62 Blears, H., *Communities in Control: Public services and local socialism*, Fabian ideas pamphlet 607, Fabian Society, June 2003.

63 Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors (the Butler Review), *Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction*, HC 898, TSO, Juky 2004.

64 Mulgan, G., Introduction in *People and participation: how to put citizens at the heart of decision making*, Involve 2005.

65 Kearton, I., *Review of Current Protests*, private memorandum, Democratic Audit, May 2003.

a widespread public debate in 2003. Within a month, people had returned over 10,000 completed questionnaires; over 70,000 people had visited the web-site and a further 13,000 questionnaires were completed online. The government abruptly cut the 'public debate' short, claiming that it had proved flawed and 'one-sided', having been taken over by anti-GM protesters.

2. The government's ambivalent attitude towards consultation was evident in the way ministers handled the series of Muslim working groups set up after the July 2005 bombings in London under the general title of 'preventing extremism together'. The government quite clearly had an agenda – to co-opt community leaders to its counter terrorism policies – and it was in a hurry. [66] The working group on community security noted in their report noted that they

'retained significant reservations about the Government's intentions and commitment to the process. This is partly based on the rushed and poorly organised nature of the current consultation process; and the impression conveyed by the dialogue to date that these consultation meetings were designed more for effect than for any meaningful input.' [67]

At local level, there is some sturdy empirical research on the experience and effects of participation exercises. We consulted a recent study for the Economic and Social Research Council that examines in detail policy forums, social services and NHS user groups, senior citizens forums, residents and area advisory groups – 17 case studies in all – in two unnamed English cities. [68] This study is a treasure trove of information and insights. Briefly, the authors observe that more and more participation is taking place, 'but the neo-liberal programme of state reform means that such participation relates to an ever-shrinking public sphere.' They identify significant public issues – for example, PFI hospital building schemes and council procurement policies – that have profound local consequences but are not subject to participation exercises. The case studies suggested to them that the emphasis in these exercises on the delivery of public services was too narrow and that 'quite wide ranging' issues of legitimate public concern from environmental protection to neighbourhood safety were also proper matters for participation.

Overall, the authors' findings have led them to being relatively pessimistic about the potential of participation initiatives 'to overcome entrenched institutional or political forms of power' and 'barriers to institutional change'. However, they also identified cases – for example, a campaign to keep a health centre open – which had positive outcomes and led to a wish among the participants to continue being engaged. What also comes through clearly is that the participants often brought to bear a more holistic and experiential view of the services involved that could potentially improve the quality of what was on offer and make it more directly relevant to local needs and aspirations. For example, the health centre users wanted it to become a centre for healthy living and to create services that were linked to ill-health and the effects of poverty. People in several groups carried out valuable research when given the opportunity. But the bureaucratic rule-book often stifled the flexibility required to make full use of the participants' contribution and could even lead to their being excluded from following up their own initiatives with public funding. Equally damaging can be the perceptions of officials and professionals who assume that service users lack the capacity or ability to contribute.

The authors found that separate organisation – the occupation of 'created' or 'claimed' space – often enabled potentially disregarded users to generate a collective voice and to challenge the way 'in which their identities as "clients" or "patients" had been constructed in professional discourses' – a perennial issue.[69] Some organised groups managed to remain rooted in autonomous action; others became partly 'captured' by the professionals or organisations they were dealing with. Organised pressure groups could be valuable and enabling and groups of people with origins in social movements or campaigning could make some genuine official acceptance of 'partnership discourses and practices', even if unequal, a condition of their engagement with official bodies. However, the authors wryly note that other studies of participation under New Labour have suggested that the overall shift towards 'partnership' closes down diversity and autonomy, a warning note confirmed by much of their data.[70]

66 See Blick, A., Choudhury, T., and Weir, S., *The Rules of the Game: Terrorism, Community and Human Rights*, Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, 2006.

67 Home Office, *Preventing Extremism Together* (Report of the Home Office Working Groups), Home Office, 2005.

68 Barnes, M., Newman, J., Sullivan, H., Power, *Participation and Political Renewal: case studies in public participation*, The Policy Press, University of Bristol, 2007.

69 See also, Barnes, M., *Care, communities and citizens*, Addison Wesley Longman, Harlow, 1997; and Barnes, M., and Bowl, R., *Taking over the asylum: empowerment and mental health*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2001.

70 See Newman, J., *Modernising governance: New Labour, policy and society*, Sage 2001; Taylor, M., *Public policy in the community*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2003

While moves to make use of citizens' juries and other schemes are encouraging, it is important to acknowledge potential flaws. The authorities tend to set and control the agenda, can restrict options and may steer participants away from wider, more fundamental issues. Indeed, they could used to pass the buck for unpalatable decisions, perhaps the result of resource allocation decisions taken at a higher level. A monograph from a team at the University of Essex has set out possible flaws in the process: first, there is an over-emphasis on rationality and deliberation, thereby excluding voices which employ other means of communication; secondly, there is a drive towards consensus which could serve to provide superficial solutions to fundamental disagreements; and thirdly, once again, there is the problem of agenda control. In other words, the dangers of control and direction associated with 'invited' participation are not necessarily avoided, and may well be replicated in an apparently open and benign process. The authors argue for more open-ended juries as a solution to these problems.[71]

3. Created/claimed spaces

These are the spaces for action and participation claimed by 'less powerful actors from or against the power holders, or created autonomously by them' [72], though very often relatively powerful actors such as Sir Bob Geldof or Jamie Oliver lend the weight of their fame, or reputation, to particular causes. Creation of these spaces breaks down into two broad categories – structured, through formal associations or social movements, and unstructured campaigns and protests, though they overlap and metamorphise: for example, unstructured protests or groups very often overcome Dowding's 'collective action problems' and form into short or long term associations.

Unfortunately, there is scant empirical work on the outcomes of associational activities, though Iain Kearton's paper for Democratic Audit covered the activities of the Countryside Alliance (along with the 2000 petrol blockades, the GM crops protests and the campaign against the Iraq war). [73] We have however undertaken to chart the huge and various number of campaigns and protests that have sprung up since 1997 to try and assemble a collective picture of claimed and created citizen action.

Even at global level citizens can unite across the world and claim and create a broad space that can have a profound effect on public policy. John Gaventa has for example analysed how the global movement, that came to be known as Jubilee 2000, managed in less than 10 years to put the impact of debt on poor nations on the public agenda across the world, informing and mobilising millions of people in both north and south. This broad coalition of people from 60 countries finally brought about debt cancellation for dozens of developing nations, 'with tangible effects in some places on education, housing and health care'. [74] Gaventa explains how the coalition aligned itself across both 'vertical' and 'horizontal' dimensions of power:

- vertically, it mobilised globally at G7, World Bank, Paris Club and other gatherings, nationally with organisations and campaigns in over 60 countries, and locally linking with groups such as the Ugandan Debt Network;
- horizontally, it not only challenged and made transparent the deliberations in relatively closed spaces, it also took advantage of new opportunities for consultation and negotiation, in invited spaces such as discussions around debt.[75]

There is no systematic published analysis of claimed and created spaces, as there is with at least a sample of invited spaces. To get some grasp on this non or less associational activity, here is the list of protests and campaigns since 1997 that we have assembled. This is clearly not an exhaustive list, but the variety of activities does reflect the diversity of political causes and actions in the UK.

Animal welfare

Disruptions of hunting with hounds

Releasing animals from mink farms

Actions against animal experimentation

Protests against the policy of destroying livestock in the foot and mouth epidemic

Capitalism and globalisation

May Day protests against capitalism

International demonstrations involving UK activists at meetings of international financial organisations

Mass demonstrations in UK cities demanding international debt cancellation

The Gate Gourmet workers' actions

'Make Poverty History' and Jubilee 2000

Fair trade campaigns

The environment and transport

Actions against road-building and airport extensions

71 Ward, H., Norval, A., Landman, T., Pretty, J. 'Open Citizens' Juries and the Politics of Sustainability', *Political Studies*, 2003, Vol. 51, pp282-99.

72 Gaventa, J., 'Levels, spaces and forms of power: Analysing opportunities for change', in Berenskoetter, F., and Williams, M. J. (eds.), *Power in World Politics*, Routledge 2007 (forthcoming).

73 Kearton, op cit.

74 Gaventa, J., op cit; and Mayo, M., *Global Citizens: Social Movements and the Challenge of Globalization*, Zed Books, 2005.

75 Gaventa, op cit.

'Reclaim the streets' protests against traffic and pollution

Blockades of fuel distribution in protest against high fuel duties

Modbury ban on plastic bags

Transition-towns movement (lessening reliance on oil)

Farming and the countryside

Countryside Alliance demonstrations against neglect of rural needs and hunting ban

Farmers' blockades of ports and supermarkets in protest at the import of cheap meat

Mass trespasses by walkers demanding open access to the countryside

Destruction of trial GM crops

Campaign against Post Office closures

Social justice and racial disadvantage

Campaign for public inquiry into police handling of Stephen Lawrence's murder

Mass protests by Asian youth in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford

Protest demonstration in Brixton against the police shooting of a black youth

The McCartney sisters protest against their brother's murder

Protests against deportations of asylum seekers

Social policy and welfare

Campaign by employees who 'lost' pensions for government assistance

Demonstrations by the disabled against changes to benefit regulations

Campaigns and demonstrations against hospital closures

Unofficial referendum in Scotland to keep 'clause 28' ban on local authority support for homosexuality

Fathers for Justice protest over access to children

Hospital closures campaigns

Campaigns against PFI schemes

Campaign in defence of council housing

Service families campaign against service conditions

Various patients' campaigns against NHS refusals of cancer and other drugs

Numerous self-help associations of sufferers from medical conditions

Parents' and other campaigns against deaths caused by dangerous driving

Vigilantism

Actions to force known or suspected paedophiles from their homes and neighbourhoods

Campaign to identify the killers of James Bulger on release from detention

War and weapons of destruction

Mass campaign to ban handguns ('Snowdrop' campaign)

Campaign to ban use of landmines

Protest against Trident base in Scotland

Invasion of Menwith Hill communications base in protest against its use in 'Star Wars' programme

Anti-Iraq war rallies and marches and some children's demonstrations

Direct actions seeking to disable USAF bombers on eve of bombardment of Iraq

Anti-Trident campaign

Observations

What is common to all these actions and campaigns is a shared sense of anger or grievance about a situation or policy decision that is perceived as damaging to people's well-being, whether that of the activists involved or those they care about. In many cases the focus of resentment is a policy decision by a powerful public or private body that affects people negatively, and the protest activity can be described as *reactive* (post office or hospital closures, Gate Gourmet workers, Trident missile replacement). In other examples the action can be described as *proactive*, since the basis of the campaign is the failure of a powerful body to address a perceived harm, and its purpose is either to stir the responsible body to take appropriate action (Jubilee 2000, Fair Trade, police inaction over the Stephen Lawrence murder), or to provide a collective remedy independently (the Modbury ban on plastic bags, the transition towns movement). It is the shared sense of grievance or injustice among a relevant public that provides the 'fuel' for the campaign, but it usually requires one or two individuals to provide the 'spark' that sets it alight, while existing informal networks or organisations typically give additional 'combustibility'.

What is worth reflecting on, given the wealth of literature on 'collective action problems', is how frequently these problems are overcome, even among supposedly disadvantaged latent groups, once a shared grievance is sufficiently strong. Incentives to collective action thus matter as much as resources or opportunities.

How to assess the impact or 'success' of these citizen actions in claimed or created spaces is more difficult than to explain why they occur in the first place. Easiest of course is where they lead to a reversal of a contested policy decision, as in the climbdown of the Greene King brewery in face of the Lewes pub boycott, or the courts' reversal of the local NHS decision to refuse a cancer drug. Less definitive is where a policy is modified in the face of protest rather than abandoned outright. Yet politics is not a zero-sum game; compromise is a part of its fabric; and even a failure to reverse a contested decision can lead to a change in the calculations under which future decisions are made. A classic example was the campaign against the Newbury bypass; it did not succeed in stopping it, but by hugely inflating the cost of security for such developments, it led to the more contentious ones being abandoned for a decade. Here the 'law of

anticipated reactions' can work in campaigners' favour.

Then there are other more indirect effects, such as influencing the climate of public opinion within which government and corporations have to work, but whose precise impact is more difficult to assess. The global demonstrations against the Iraq war could not stop it happening, but they are said to have influenced the UN Security Council's decision to deny it international legitimacy, which in turn had significant consequences for the course of the occupation. The struggle for legitimacy, or 'reputation' in Dowding's terms, is an important part of what is at issue in these campaigns. As one of the Lewes pub campaigners remarked:

> 'We've shown that it's possible for a small group of committed people to change the mind of a huge company. We knew the loss of trade was hardly going to make a dent in their huge profits, but the loss of reputation would really make them think, so that's what we had to aim for, and we succeeded.' [76]

76 *The Guardian,* 23 April 2007.

Part 5 Conclusions

We bring this paper to an end with some conclusions drawn from the various perspectives on power and influence that we have brought to bear; and some preliminary comments and recommendations with regard to the government's existing policies and recent participation proposals.

Perspectives on power and influence

1. Participation is a remarkably buoyant phenomenon that engages a wide range of publics and communities over a diverse and even idiosyncratic raft of issues. Despite the inequalities in resources and power that we have noted above (and see point 2 below), protests and action rise spontaneously at all levels of society. People who possess relatively little power have to combine if they are to achieve their purposes and must be ready visibly to confront power-holders; but it is common and probably wise even for more powerful groups to combine forces.

2. However in sum participation undoubtedly makes an unequal contribution to public policy since it is the rich and middle classes who possess the resources both to participate themselves and to restrict the access of others to resources; and their participation and networking in associational activities widen the gap between their life chances and opportunities and those of poorer and disadvantaged people. Participation policies must therefore concentrate on means to improve the opportunities and resources for socially excluded groups and individuals to participate more fully, but government needs urgently to address and seek to remedy the damaging inequalities that scar British society.

3. The government's commitment to participation should be grasped but without illusions. At national and local level, as we show above, the government's commitment to its own policies has often outweighed a commitment to participation; and at all levels, official policies and attitudes can frame and restrict agendas of 'invited' participation spaces, and even of apparently neutral and open exercises like citizens' juries. It makes sense to regard an invitation to participate as the first round of a prolonged engagement and to organise outside the official opening as well as within it.

4. Many of the lessons for national action apply at local level. Here the idea of 'community' is very strong. However, the notion of

geographic 'community' as the standard base for participation or consultation requires careful examination (see point 6 below).

5. Organised groups and communities of all sorts and at all levels should develop the government's emphasis on consultation into processes of active participation. The new duty on councils to consult could be used to create active participation in policy-making as well as service delivery. Such provisions as the strengthening of the scrutiny function of council members, more space for petitions, experiments in direct democracy, etc, offer opportunities that can be buttressed with analysis of local power structures.

6. The use of formal channels of redress and inquiry and resort to the courts and tribunals can give groups an additional grasp on power: for example, the ESOL campaign we mention on p.20 got a huge boost from a formal Race Equality Impact Assessment; resort to the courts proved to be a turning point in campaigns by women with breast cancer for access to drugs they were denied.

7. The complexity of the web of institutions, actors and official documentation at regional and sub-regional as well as local level inevitably inhibits the ability of local groups to pursue major public policy causes. However, sufficient documentation and media reports generally exist that will identify existing policies and the institutions that are making the running in policy areas that people are concerned with. A sense of the governing regime and its principals will be important to focusing any campaign.

8. The official emphasis on area-based participation is valuable in itself, but it does not reflect the great diversity of 'communities' in an increasingly complex society. Official statistics themselves reveal a 'churning effect' in local areas, with up to a third of populations changing within one year. 'Collective action' may be located in a local neighbourhood or other geographic area and parents at a local school, frail old people attending a care centre, or aggrieved drinkers at a local pub may form a community. However, junior doctors, environmental activists, people suffering from cystic fibrosis, hauliers, fox hunters, women with breast cancer, fathers denied access to their children, racists and myriad others may combine in collective action.

9. Geoff Mulgan's distinction between 'strong power and weak power controls' (see p.14 above) is valuable, suggesting as it does that non-hierarchical, horizontal networks can exercise power using relatively little energy, placing them at an advantage with respect to more traditional and hierarchical organisations.

10. People participating in official 'invited spaces' have a stronger voice when they are also part of an autonomous collective group.

11. Most of the distinctions made with regard to participation and power, several of which we make use of in this paper, run the danger of simplifying what actually happens. The most common distinction – that between individual and collective action – does not reflect the fact that many individual rights or actions provide a handle or focus for collective action. Many individual actions very soon lead onto collective action; and very often a collective endeavour, as in the Modbury plastic bag ban, has been inspired by one individual.

12. John Gaventa's emphasis on the different levels of power is an important insight. But in practice the effects of global decisions and policies on daily life in the UK is still not part of the nation's 'common sense'. In practice, the global only sometimes informs collective action at national or local level – even though campaigns like 'Make Poverty History' have begun to inform and mobilise people at large over the north's part in poverty in developing countries and, as we have seen, the global consequences of the widespread use of plastic bags brought about a local reaction in Modbury (see page 14). The links between national, regional and local policies is better appreciated, and can more readily be explored and exposed, less so the impact of the global dimension that Kenny Ball, the UNISON branch secretary in Newcastle, discovered in Porto Alegre (see page 20).

13. The state itself provides important resources for collective action that give individuals and groups a grasp on power – e.g., 'civil and political and some social and economic rights, access to official information, legislation on the minimum wage or facilities for disabled people,

systems of complaint and redress, elected representatives, the presence of scrutiny bodies. Action by individuals, both within and outside the courts and tribunals, can deliver collective goods.

14. The internet provides ordinary citizens with new potential for acquiring some of the resources that lead to collective action and group formation and can add to their power, notably through information, expertise and reputation. A key implication of this potential is that non-state actors can become more powerful vis-à-vis the state; state institutions tend to suffer a net loss of nodality in the on-line world. But any endeavour to use the internet to rebalance power relations and enhance participation must take account of inequities in access, etc.

15. A host of NGOs, charities and associations at all levels of society exist that enable people to make use of state and other opportunities for collective action. More of those that act as advocates on behalf of disadvantaged groups or communities could do more to involve them in their arguments and campaigning. 'Clientism' is a sin.

16. The trade unions are no longer the significant players in political life that they were in the 1970s, but they are an important part of social democracy in the UK and remain a huge resource for social justice campaigning outside the workplace. In some respects, the trade unions themselves need to understand their potential.

17. Political parties are important channels for power and influence, especially at local level where some parties may be in power and others willing to challenge that power. However, the two main parties are rarely open to the influence of their members at national level, though other parties may be persuaded to back a campaign or protest.

18. National campaigns and protests depend to a great degree on securing public support which may not be sufficient for them to achieve their purposes but is generally essential if they are to do so. The public is willing to support direct action campaigns so long as they are non-violent and are undertaken in terms of the general, not sectional, good. Protests can therefore make use of disruptive tactics that may even de-stabilise society and everyday life.

19. The 'oxygen of publicity' is vital at all levels. Experienced pressure groups, charities and other bodies generally build a media strategy into their campaigns, as it helps to serve notice on the authorities that there is or may be public interest in a given issue. Publicity is of course an aid to informing and legitimising a campaign or protest and to recruiting supporters.

Comments on local democracy

As we have shown above (see Part 2), 'local governance' is scarcely local at all. In the first instance, local authorities are too large to be close to their local populations. Secondly, they are over-dependent on central government financing which is available subject to central government policy prescriptions and strict financial controls. Thirdly, powerful quangos at national and regional level determine major policies along with larger local authorities in remote high-level 'partnerships' above the heads of smaller authorities; and quangos at all levels determine huge swathes of local priorities and distribute resources accordingly. .

Gordon Brown has committed himself to 'change' in Britain's constitutional arrangements. Nowhere in the state is 'change' more essential than at local and regional level. To make a reality of greater participation, especially over major decisions as promised in the governance green paper, we recommend a fundamental reversal of existing policies towards local government and the quango state so that local authorities can be made considerably more autonomous in terms of their policies, revenues and expenditure and protected against constant central government intervention.

Otherwise, the government's proposals will raise people's expectations too high for existing local authorities to respond to their wishes, except on the margins. Take participatory budgeting. Hazel Blears, the Secretary of State, has suggested that minor local decisions – for parks, play areas, ASBO policies and the like – would be open to participatory budgeting. Her proposals throw into relief a striking contrast between Britain's weak and remote local authorities and Porto Alegre, the Brazilian city that pioneered participatory budgeting. A World Bank Social Development Note states that municipalities in Brazil like Porto Alegre have 'considerable autonomy over their revenues (raised from local taxes, tariffs and federal transfers) and expenditures' [1] – and it is this autonomy that

1 Social Development Notes, Case Study 2 – Porto Alegre, Brazail: Participatory Approaches in Budgeting and Public Expenditure Management, siteresources.worldbank.ng/INTPCENG/1143372-1116506093229/20511036/sdn71.pdf

makes participatory budgeting there meaningful. The World Bank note and other sources describe a sophisticated annual budgeting cycle with three distinct levels of citizen engagement through popular assemblies at regional and neighbourhood area, regional budget forums and the municipal budget council. Every citizen has the right to be directly involved through electing a representative to the neighbourhood assembly. Decisions are usually based on needs criteria and direct negotiations between neighbourhood forums that go on to monitor implementation. The budgeting process decided major regional decisions on transportation; education, leisure and culture; health and social welfare; economic development and taxation; and city organisation, as well as neighbourhood decisions.[2]

The proposal for a concordat between central government and the Local Government Association seems to recognise the need for government to give authorities more autonomy. However, the way in which it is framed in the green paper places far more responsibility upon local authorities to satisfy central government than for central government to give formal recognition to local autonomy. We recommend that as part of its moves towards a written constitution the government hold a public debate about giving local government constitutional protection on the European model and create strong and self confident local authorities according to the criteria of the European Charter for Local Self Government .

We have already emphasised the basic principle that consultative and participatory processes should take place within the structures of representative democracy. Direct democracy ought to be complementary to representative democracy and should not be allowed to replace it.

2 World Bank Social Development Note, op cit; .Chavez Minos, D., 'Porto Alegre, Brazil: A new sustainable and replicable model of participatory and democratic governance?, www.tni.org/archives/chavez/portoalegre.pdf ; Smith, G., *Democratic Innovations: A Report for POWER*, February 2005, www.powerinquiry.org

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