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ASEPTIC NEUTRALITY: AMERICAN BEHAVIORALISM

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## INTRODUCTION

Robert Dahl's Who Governs (1) is one of the best examples of the dominant style of research in political studies today. This critical study of Dahl as a representative modern political analyst is an attempt to detail some of the problems facing the discipline and especially to investigate the relationship between the value premises of a social scientist and his empirical research.

As a representative of the "behavioralist" school of political research, Dahl claims to refrain from making value judgments on his subjects. One of the major preoccupations of this study is to indicate the several senses in which the behaviorist approach is in fact value laden. We show how the values the researcher holds shape the kinds of problems that he perceives, his methods of data collection, his findings and his interpretation of them. More precisely, we have attempted to analyze the way Dahl's "value free" approach to political science serves the ideological function of condoning the inequities of current American Society.

Studying New Haven, Connecticut, as a representative American city, Dahl sees the development of community power structure from the late eighteenth century to the present as a change "from oligarchy to pluralism" (p. 11), from a patrician-dominated society to a more democratic one. He bases this appraisal on a shift in the background of political officeholders from an upper class elite to lower social strata, and from the participation today of a wider segment of the community in voting and political decision-making.<sup>(2)</sup> Dahl is able to arrive at this optimistic conclusion, however, only because throughout both his historical survey and his study of present-day New Haven he repeatedly evades making an adequate correlation of political officeholding and decision-making to the realities of socio-economic power in the country as a whole and in New Haven itself. Consequently this analysis begs many obvious questions. Why, for instance, have political leaders suppressed controversial issues and accepted the existing socioeconomic power structure? Why and how have monopoly businesses and economic and racial inequality been granted political legitimacy? Why does a "democratic" creed persist despite its divorce from social and economic reality? Dahl's failure to cope with these questions indicates the methodological and substantive distortions that result from his particular value premises.

## I. ON HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

### New Haven and the Nation

Dahl's argument that there has been a change from oligarchy to pluralism in the political history of both the United States and of New Haven is extremely confused on several points. In his introduction he concedes that America's development from an eighteenth-century agrarian society to the present industrial society has greatly increased socio-economic inequality, but he implies that his study will demonstrate that political inequality has not simultaneously increased. He not only fails to substantiate this last claim subsequently, but sometimes flatly contradicts it, as in the following passage comparing the historical patterns in New Haven and the country in general:

In the United States as a whole, an industrial society followed an agrarian society. In New Haven, an industrial society followed a hierarchical urban society dominated by a patrician oligarchy. In the agrarian society, political resources were dispersed in an approximation to equality such as the civilized world had never before seen. In the old oligarchy of New Haven, political resources were concentrated in the familiar pattern of hierarchical societies. Against the background of an agrarian society, the institutions and processes of industrial society produced a concentration of political resources. Against the background of oligarchy in New Haven, the institutions and processes of industrial society produced a dispersion of political resources.

But this dispersion did not recapture the equalitarian distribution of political resources that existed in agrarian America. Industrial society dispersed, it did not eradicate political inequality. (3)

Whatever dubious reasons Dahl may have for undertaking this impossibly forced comparison, what he seems to come out of it saying is that New Haven is now more pluralistic than it used to be, though less than the country as a whole used to be. With all of his effort to find some tenuous correlation between New Haven's and the country's histories, the only clear conclusion that emerges is that New Haven is anything but the representative American community that Dahl is ostensibly studying it as. The first thing we have to keep in mind, then, is that even if Dahl should show that New Haven has in fact progressed from "cumulative" to "dispersed" inequalities -- a disputable point in itself, as well shall see -- by Dahl's own admission this progression not only cannot be generalized for the rest of the country, but is the opposite of the country's progression, as can be inferred from a careful reading of the above quotation. If Dahl were to pursue the implications of this disparity, he would have to consider the possibility that local democratic trends unique to New Haven may have been more than offset by undemocratic national trends that presumably also affected New Haven. He would also have to acknowledge a decline in the influence of the entire local power structure as political control has shifted to the federal government and economic control to the nationwide corporations. Instead, Dahl simply ignores the national perspective throughout most of the rest of the book.

From Oligarchy to Pluralism?

Even within Dahl's exclusively local perspective, his assertion that New Haven was originally much more oligarchic than at present is subject to dispute. His opening section centers on a chart showing the political parties and occupations of the city's mayors from 1784 to 1953 (pp. 12-14). He claims that early New Haven was dominated by patrician-Congregationalist-Federalist elite who "had all the political resources they needed: wealth, social position, education, and a monopoly of public office".<sup>(4)</sup> Dahl's data, however, are not conclusive enough to prove his case. He produces no evidence of the power of the patricians' social status, nor any list of each of the mayors' relative wealth. He indicates that there were six Democratic-Republicans and Democrats in opposition to the six Federalists elected mayor between 1793 and 1839. Though Dahl does not list the mayors by religion, at least one definitely was not a Congregationalist. Even in 1787 only twenty-six percent of the population belonged to this faith -- hence religion was not a factor in molding the minds of the majority to support "Congregational theocracy." The early town-meeting government was used as the instrument of a ruling class oligarchy.

Dahl sees further evidence of democratization in the change in occupational origins of New Haven's mayors from patrician professionals and landowners in the period of 1784-1841, to

middle class industrial entrepreneurs in 1842-1898, to immigrant-stock "ex-plebes" in 1899-1953. Dahl's case is not strengthened by the fact that Roger Sherman, New Haven's first elected mayor (1784-1793) and subsequently a United States senator, was the son of a farmer and was himself a shoemaker. He may have been an exception, but by the same token one might ask how many shoemakers have been elected to the Senate from Connecticut lately.

The shifts in the ethnic and family-occupational backgrounds of officeholders that Dahl emphasizes are perhaps less significant than the fact that most members of all three groups were at the time of their election representatives of the socio-economic elite. Even in the "ex-plebe" period only one mayor represented organized labor: J.W. Murphy, a business agent for the Cigar Workers A.F.L. The most frequent occupation of the mayors in both the patrician and ex-plebe periods was law. Dahl does not adequately consider the changing role of the politicians' occupations within the community power structure. Those who practiced law in the early period, for example, were apt to have been in government service or the university (three mayors in the patrician period were law professors); if they had a private practice, it was likely to have been in the service of small merchants and farmers, while today lawyers who go into politics are more likely to have served corporations or wealthy private clients. Businessmen have increasingly

dominated politics since the entrepreneurial period, but the entrepreneurs were mostly local owner-manufacturers, while the recent businessmen have more often been in the managerial "propertyless middle class", working for national corporations -- developments not hard to understand in the closed world of nationwide monopoly capitalism.

In seeing a shift toward greater popular influence during the span of his historical study of New Haven, it appears that Dahl has let his evolutionary positivism get the better of his capacity to interpret his material. If there has in fact been a transfer in power from a professional class to a manufacturing class to a white collar class, this movement toward equality has all remained within the middle class. Certainly there is no evidence that the changes resulted in any increase in the influence of workers or the poor.

#### Political and Economic Development

Dahl's inventory of the occupations of the several officeholders tells us very little about what interests and institutions politicians have aided, what classes and groups have been the beneficiaries and "lowers." He argues that change in the social origins of officeholders over the last two hundred years indicates the growth of democracy, but he disregards the politicians' role

in the simultaneous development of a hierarchical industrial capitalist society that has created new social inequalities and an undemocratic concentration of ownership, resources, and economic decision-making.

The federal and local governments played an important role in converting the country from an agrarian to an industrial society, promoting the activities of the private entrepreneur by affirming his legitimacy and allowing for the exploitation of labor. The lower class resisted these government policies: working men's associations, trade unions and political clubs and parties were formed to defend the interests of labor. Dahl does not discuss the positions that the established political parties and officeholders took toward this resistance. Did they bolster the business groups by articulating the American Business Creed, exclude deviants, manipulate citizens' committees (as Dahl describes their present counterparts as doing)? Did they make government policy a marginal factor in the community's decision-making process -- allowing business the "freedom" to grow and establish the pattern of economic development and income distribution, furthering opportunities for some, limiting it for others? In other words, did they serve the interests of a socio-economic ruling class?

Implicit in Dahl's schema of political development from oligarchy to pluralism is an idea of "freedom" in the negative sense

of freedom from church control, electoral exclusiveness, patrician domination, etc. Dahl does not consider new sources of control and discipline identified with bureaucratic industry or the increasing use of the schools, mass media, and political parties as impersonal substitutes for the more personalized domination of the Church, Village Censor, and traditional oligarchy.

Nor does Dahl consider the shift toward absentee corporate power in the twentieth century.

W. Lloyd Warner's account of social and economic change in a New England city from a local patriarchal community to one subordinated to absentee owners differs sharply with Dahl's view of an evolution from oligarchy to pluralism:

In the early days of the shoe industry, the owners and managerial staffs of the factories as well as the operatives were residents of Yankee City; there was no extension of the factory social structure outside the local community. The factories were then entirely under the control of the government -- not only the formal control of city ordinances and laws, but also the more pervasive informal controls of community tradition and attitudes... With the vertical extension of the management hierarchy, the social distance between the top executives, on the one hand, and the workers and the community on the other, has increased... absentee ownership... accentuates this condition... Factory policies are established in the distant offices of large concerns; neither worker nor community now has any voice in them... associations... outside Yankee City and their policies are determined independently of the local community. (5)

The Lynds' two studies Middletown and Middletown in Transition present another historical account of a "representative" American city that is at considerable variance with Dahl's. They attempt to

relate changes in the social structure and the larger economic system to the political system. Like Dahl, the Lynds note the emergence of new social groups into politics; but they also note the lesser role of politicians in community decision-making.

The emergence of the "plebes" in Middletown had little to do with "pluralism" or ethnic representativeness -- but indicated the growth of business dominance in the community and the decline of political activity and politicians' power.

In Dahl's account the shift in the ethnic composition of officeholders is taken to indicate a "revolution." This is a typical example of exaggerated change, based on his one-dimensional focus on political officeholding. Middletown was a relatively homogeneous community. The fact that the "plebes" took office both in "homogeneous" Middletown and "ethnic" New Haven suggests that this might be accounted for by a third factor -- the decline in importance of political office once business dominance was established, facilitating the rise to political office of lower income individuals who accepted the dominant system.

During the 1930's the Lynds observed that: "Today the mayor, the judge and the councilmen are no longer dominant figures; their position of prestige has tended to be taken by business..." (6)

With politics a secondary field individuals from the lower middle class replaced the two leading families who "for ten years

in the nineties and early in the present century...warred for political leadership."<sup>(7)</sup> In regard to the judiciary, the Lynds wrote, "As private business looms larger, draining off the best legal talent to serve its ends, the machinery of justice tends to become less independent and imposing and somewhat more an adjunct to the city's dominant interests..."<sup>(8)</sup> With reference to the values of the community:

In a civilization in which the health of the community is gauged by its financial pulse, pre-occupation with private rather than public business on the part of its ablest citizens is increasingly regarded by Middletown as not only a normal but a desirable state of affairs.<sup>(9)</sup>

In extending their analysis of the influence of the business class on politics, the Lynds point to the restrictive nature of the political system:

In view of the fact that very few of the city's business leaders are Democrats, it is decidedly "good business" to be Republican, and this consideration in certain cases overrides the accident of birth. Economic considerations (intimidation, threats, loss of jobs) likewise prove the most effective barriers to the rise of a third party.<sup>(10)</sup>

Their observations suggest that the socio-economic elite participated directly in politics in the period when the foundations of our present society were being laid. The businessmen fashioned a society in which politics occupied an inferior position regarding important decisions affecting economic institutions and the class system. The importance of the politician as an agent of decision-

making affecting social and economic ends declined. As the role of politician became less important in defining the contours of society the type of person attracted to politics was drawn from the lower status positions.

### Notes Toward an Alternative Conception

It is through an examination of politics in terms of long term changes in the mode of production and in the social structure which lead to rise and decline of social classes, that many traditional political theorists analyzed the nature and bases of political influence. Let us take the case of New Haven and attempt to relate political changes to the changes in the socio-economic system. With the growth of manufacturing and as "patricians" went into banking and professions, the entrepreneurs moved into politics. Local businessmen were eager to achieve political power in order to facilitate the expansion of local business, to cope with labor (trade unionism), etc. In this period local government could play a role in furthering the goals of business. Because government was decentralized and industry was local (producing for a local market or located in one particular area), local government was relatively much more important and powerful, hence there was more involvement by the top socio-economic elites. As government became centralized and industrial development became national in scope (producing for a national or international market) and

plants were opened throughout the country, local government became less important and less relevant to the needs and operations of the industrial enterprises. Fewer members of the upper socio-economic groups participated or became involved. The petty-bourgeois moved into local politics, using it as a stepladder for social mobility and for creating economic opportunities for local retail entrepreneurs.

The shift from industrial capitalist officeholders to middle class professionals was the result of changes in the economic structure of society and the decline in importance of local government. The emergence of the ex-plebes was related to structural changes and had little relation to democratization of the community. On the contrary, the emergence of lower status individuals in local political office coincided with the undemocratic growth of monopoly capitalism.

The facts about early New Haven seem to indicate not an oligarchical but a pluralistic society with competing parties struggling over real political issues, with citizens having relatively equal resources, with a plurality of religions, with direct confrontation between citizen and officeholder, and with a high level of social mobility. Dahl's reversal of historical development is matched by his attempt to define present society in terms of democratic categories. Both are attempts to legitimize and

rationalize the development of a society which is at variance with its past experience and its proclaimed norms.

## II. ON DECISION-MAKING

### Political and Economic Decisions

Dahl's inadequate correlation between politics and socio-economic forces similarly distorts his study of decision-making in present-day New Haven. Dahl focuses on decisions without carefully examining the social structure those decisions are part of and the consequences of those decisions for different classes in the social structure. For example, in discussing urban redevelopment, he does not analyze in any meaningful terms what was built and who benefited (profits, increased earnings, etc.), who was evicted and displaced, what social classes (such as slum residents) were forced to move to higher rentals and/or different slums, what business groups suffered, and who paid the cost proportionate to the benefits received. In scanty references unrelated to his account of pluralist democracy Dahl indicates that "several hundred slum dwellers" and "a handful of small businessmen" suffered directly, that a "renewal of rundown residential areas" would "be increasingly difficult".<sup>(11)</sup> On the other hand, Dahl mentions that the corporate sector received a substantial subsidy from the redevelopment project in the way of developed land and

favorable locations along with a substantial profit on their old property holdings.

Dahl's conception of the "political" and thus the area he investigates in regard to decision-making excludes vast areas of public life which are the domain of the corporate world. He narrows his study of influence in public life to those issues which government officials decide. Decisions about which most people are highly concerned, such as jobs, employment, income, and the related issues of economic growth and social development, are unaccounted for. Dahl considers issues which are not very important to most people and about which they lack much knowledge. An adequate behavioral approach to the study of influence would consider those issues of public life which are most salient and most directly affect the populace, instead of a priori selecting issues from institutions which have marginal relationships to these issues.

Dahl's framework for the study of influence operates within the assumptions of what he terms the political stratum, that segment of the community that actively participates in politics. One of these assumptions is that major decisions affecting public life should be made by non-elected members of hierarchical institutions such as the private corporation:

In allocating rewards to individuals and groups, the existing socio-economic structure must be taken as given, except for minor details... The political stratum has assumed that the physical and economic features of the city are determined by forces beyond their control. (12)

Because Dahl does not consider who makes the decisions shaping the social and economic features of society except for the details, his whole study of decisions is based merely on minor details, as is his conclusion that New Haven is pluralistic. The consensus that exists among the political stratum regarding the prerogatives of the socio-economic elite in making policy affecting the socio-economic structure strengthens the elite's power over community decisions.

Understanding the impact of corporate decisions is a prerequisite to understanding the community power structure. The decisions by the non-corporate groups (dispersed and unequal) are at a lower level of importance. Dahl focuses exclusively on the decisions made by a multiplicity of groups, ignoring a range of important areas on the socio-economic foundations decided by the primary decision-makers. If the decisions of corporate groups are considered in the decision-making process, one will find less "pluralism" and more upper class dominance; less dispersion and more concentration of power; a structure of power ordered with greater hierarchy than was true in an earlier period.

" The decisions or lack of decisions in the corporate area are fundamental not only to the "on-going" politics of the community, but to the very existence of the community. Without the positive decisions of the industrial complex as to the size and rate of expansion (or contraction) in a town, the tax revenues, secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy, employment, etc., would be in a major crisis. The decision of an industry to leave an area or even to cut down on its production decisively affects a whole series of other decisions in a community.

For example, it is interesting to note that the "decision" which caused a whole series of decisions to take place on the level of the political stratum originated in the corporate world. The corporations were considering moving out of New Haven. The politicians adapted themselves to this primary decision: they organized the redevelopment plan to offer benefits and profits to the corporation. The action of the corporation was catalytic, the consequences were to dominate New Haven politics for the whole next period. The mayor's initiative in the context of the total community power structure was essentially adaptive to the interests of the corporations. At the secondary level, the political stratum having resources at their disposal, had the power to create satisfactory conditions for the corporation and hence "influence" its decision to stay. Thus use of influence can, however, be looked

upon from the viewpoint of the corporation interests as basically obeying its commands, i. e., providing greater profit opportunities.

### "Democratic" Racism

The empty formalism in Dahl's political thought leads to a more substantive failure. His lack of a definition of political participation that relates decisions to the social structure permits hierarchy, racism, and exploitation to be considered "grass roots democracy." Let us examine the case study cited by Dahl. A small entrepreneur (Lebov) attempted to build metal houses for lower-class Negroes in a working class, predominantly Italian, all-white neighborhood. As Dahl describes it, the whites mobilized their numbers ("resources"), received support from politicians and prevented the houses from being built and kept the Negroes out. (13) Dahl cites this as an example of popular involvement. (14) Involvement over what? Against whom? In the name of what values? What was the attitude of the white Italians to the Negroes coming into the neighborhood? What were the motivations of Lebov the entrepreneur in setting up these dilapidated houses? What were the conditions of the Negroes that they were forced to seek this type of housing? What do the answers to these questions tell us about the nature of the community and its relation to the political system? Unfortunately, Dahl never asks these questions. Contrary to his

pluralistic conclusions, the case study suggests that (a) lower-class Italians used the political system to keep an even poorer group below them - an attitude in keeping with and nurtured by a hierarchical social system; (b) capitalists (Lebov) can exploit Negro poverty and can get some support from City Hall to do it; (c) Negroes who were effectively excluded formed a caste separate from the rest of the community;<sup>(15)</sup> (d) the lower class whites became active not to better their condition but only because they wanted to maintain the status quo. As Dahl puts it: "After the threat disappeared, few of them did anything again (p. 197)."

The political system functions to keep Negroes segregated, to maintain the class system, to keep the lower class apathetic, to provide opportunities for capitalists to exploit poverty for profit by building tin shacks. This is hardly a description of democratic pluralistic politics. The lack of public policy to provide houses for the discriminated Negroes, to attack racism, to involve the lower class Italians in political life to improve their social-economic and educational position, to curtail avaricious capitalists who exploit poverty, indicates the basic undemocratic nature of the political system.

Dahl's thesis that New Haven has a democratic representative government fails to account for the continuing very low status of Negroes and the inability of the political system to provide a standard "assimilationist" solution. Without noting the contradiction

with his thesis, Dahl states, "Negroes...were notoriously subject to discrimination in their search for better homes."<sup>(16)</sup>

In this case, metal homes were the "better" ones in point. Dahl does not consider the racist, exploitative nature of the political system nor the mechanisms utilized to control the Negro Ghetto, yet this is a major problem not only in New Haven, but in all of the U.S. It seems more plausible to interpret the white working class's resistance to Negro housing not as an example of grass-roots democracy, as Dahl suggests, but as an example of the operation of the caste system in New Haven.

An article by Bulkeley Smith<sup>(17)</sup> tends to cast doubts on Dahl's conclusions regarding progress of Negroes in New Haven. It also casts some light on the issue of the efficacy of Negro political participation in the two party system. Dahl writes that the Negroes in New Haven "are gradually dispersing."<sup>(18)</sup> and that "discrimination is declining" though Negroes still encounter "far greater obstacles than the average white person." Dahl thus presents a picture of New Haven wherein discrimination is still present, but gradually withering away. This is followed by figures showing that Negroes are one of the "two most active groups of participants in campaigns and elections."<sup>(19)</sup> He goes on to separate "political action" from "private socio-economic spheres" and concludes that Negroes find "no greater obstacles to achieving their goals through political action (than whites)." Dahl surely

agrees that a primary goal for Negroes is to get out of the ghetto. We can infer from Dahl's remarks that if the active role of Negroes in the current two-party system continues, discrimination will disappear. However, Bulkeley Smith in a block by block study indicates that segregation is increasing in New Haven: "The city contains two major segregated areas both of which expanded between 1940 and 1950, as well as several blocks scattered throughout the city which contain very few dwelling units occupied by non-whites."<sup>(20)</sup> Smith observes that Negroes are increasingly pushed into poorer housing and out of the better areas:

Between 1940 and 1950, the number of new blocks with less than ten percent non-white residency increased in the poorest areas and decreased in the better ones... (during 1940-1950) Negroes who pioneered in previously all-white blocks either chose or were forced to accept, housing in areas of lower status than that being vacated by Negroes at the same time in other predominantly white occupied blocks.

Smith pointed out that Negroes are increasingly being confined to the worst slums of New Haven:

Moreover new blocks in the category of ten to forty-nine per cent non-white occupancy, which increased from twenty-eight blocks in 1940 to sixty-two in 1950 also were found about twice as often in area VI (where the poorest slums are to be found) and in industrial areas as anywhere in the city. It appears, therefore, that this tendency for Negroes increasingly to enter poorer areas is not confined to predominantly white blocks.

The author concludes by noting that for Negroes, "renting from whites is close to impossible;" thus the "increasing concentration

of Negroes in New Haven's central black belt." Dahl's vacuous statements of Negro progress are undermined by the evidence in Smith's study. Moreover, important questions are raised by the Smith findings concerning the efficacy of Negroes' political participation toward realizing their goals. If Negroes are so "active" politically, and their goals are moving further away, perhaps "politics" as Dahl conceives of it is less an agency for change and advancement and more likely a means of distribution of marginal favors to maintain Negroes in a subordinate position. The gap between what Dahl describes as the high level of Negro political activism and their low level of achievements warrants a reassessment of the social nature of the political parties of New Haven. It is a dubious proposition to assert that a growing de facto caste structure is compatible with a "diffuse power structure" and a representative party system.

#### Contemporary Decisions in Historical Perspective

Dahl's approach omits an historical analysis of decision-making regarding key issues. A longitudinal approach would inform us of the relative importance of particular contemporary issues. The manner in which key decisions in the past were resolved and determination of two benefited from the outcome of these decisions, sets the stage for any analysis of contemporary issues and decisions. Cumulative favorable outcomes, promoting

the development of capitalist wealth (inequalities, etc.) would tend to minimize the importance of individual recent decisions which do not counteract the historical advantages which have accrued to particular groups. By omitting this longitudinal dimension and by measuring power in terms of decision outcomes at the end of a historical sequence one gives undue weight to the present issues.

The purely subjective method that Dahl uses to measure key "issues," their "reputation" for importance among contemporary denizens of New Haven, is an abdication of any serious analysis of the historical evolution of any society. Issues considered important may merely reflect the limited knowledge of Dahl's informants and the power that special interests have in shaping mass attitudes.

There is a false assumption underlying Dahl's treatment of contemporary decision-making. He implicitly assumes that in measuring decision-making power 'A' and 'B' in the present 'X' that both have equally benefited in the past 'Y'. However, Dahl knows (without analyzing why and how) vast inequalities have emerged in U. S. society. 'A' has been granted enormous possessions and controls decisions in a multitude of spheres which are rules "part of the system." In a specific conflict in the present period any incremental "victory" of 'B' cannot indicate the greater power of 'B' over 'A' (as Dahl's method and conclusions suggest) unless

that victory is put in the context of past decisions and measured against the cumulated "favorable" decisions of 'A'. If decisions favoring 'A' occur for 100 years and in 1958 an issue is resolved in favor of 'B' how does that reflect on the power of A and B? Significant change in decision-making (utilized as a measure of power) can be determined by the degree to which decisions seriously change the historical advantages which have accrued to one or another group. If 'A' controlled productive facilities valued at 100 million dollars, established the legitimacy of vast inequalities of wealth and opportunity and decision-making power over the economy (including the political stratum's acceptance of the economic and social system), for 'A' to "lose" on an issue of a five cent raise to union 'B' (which may consider this an "important issue") does not indicate the power of 'B' over 'A'. The decision outcome favoring 'B' does not substantially change the laws of control nor reverse past decisions favoring 'A'. In brief, Dahl fails to discuss the establishment of the economic foundation of society within which contemporary decision-making takes place.

### III. ON POLITICS AS POWER

A study of the way that Dahl treats the idea of power will reveal several problems posed by the modern pluralist school's analysis of contemporary American Society. Dahl misses important distinctions in many power situations by only considering them

on the level of the local decision-maker (i. e., the mayor). The values and ideology of the decision-maker derived from historical development and socialization influence his decisions and how they will be implemented. His perception of the "realities" of social and economic power causes him to anticipate reactions and to adjust his program. These factors shape the decision of the decision-maker and are crucial determinants of power. These factors cannot be determined by counting initiatives and vetoes of individuals in meetings.

"Influence" and "success in decisions" lack any precise definition. In an earlier article entitled "The Concept of Power," Dahl evades the problem of specifying a definition -- or more correctly theorized it away: "We are much more likely to produce a variety of theories of limited scope, each of which employs some (?) definition of power that is useful(?) in the context of the particular research or theory but different in important (?) respects from the definition of other studies." <sup>(21)</sup> This definitional weakness leads to considerable confusion in Dahl's work. Dahl describes those of highest social standing as not exercising a high degree of influence. Instead the middling sectors tend to possess a high degree of influence. Dahl does not explain how and why a group which governs, is most influential, remains socially and economically inferior (i. e., at the middle levels). One of the "conditions" for middle class "influence" and/or governing apparently is that

the upper class be left in charge of its socio-economic spheres. One could then argue that the imposition of this "condition" (which has great importance in setting a framework for the kind of political decisions Dahl discusses) by the upper class and its acceptance by the middle class -- this political decision -- must be accounted of prime importance. Dahl hardly considers it. Rather, he mentions that none of the political stratum wish to change the socio-economic structure and leaves it at that. In this instance, Dahl misses the point which he made in his article on the behavioral approach in criticizing some behavioralists for overlooking the historical viewpoint: "It is evident that variables of great importance in human affairs may exhibit little or no change in a given historical period. As a result, the investigator whose work falls in this period may not see the significance of these variables and may fail to incorporate them in his theoretical statements. And even if he does perceive their importance, the absence of variation will prevent a proper test of hypothesis that states the relation of these factors to other variables of his theory."<sup>(22)</sup>

Dahl utilizes a "fragmented approach" to analyze "resources." He analyzes control of industry, credit, news media, ideology, education, etc., separately, not their inter-relation, to determine the extent to which they are reinforcing the same values, outlooks and behavior. This fragmented methodology leads to "dispersed

factors": the unit of analysis is isolated and implicitly the alternative hypothesis of a coherent set of values buttressing an elite is suppressed. The problem is posed in terms of the relationship of isolated resources to influence, without asking three related questions: What is the relationship of resource holders to each other? To what extent do media and entrepreneurs, educators and politicians influence the choices and alternatives which are offered to the citizens to vote on? If "numbers of votes" is a resource how does one add it up and compare it to the collective resources of forces which direct the vote toward support of the socio-economic status quo? Dahl gives no systematic explanation for the failure to examine the cumulative impact of education and schools, <sup>(23)</sup> mass media and their message, <sup>(24)</sup> political socialization and political screening, and ownership of industry, on the organization of power in political life.

### Dispersed Resources

One of the key conceptual problems in Dahl's analysis is found in his discussion of "dispersed inequalities." Dahl describes the pluralist political system as one of "dispersed inequalities," which is taken to mean a political system in which "resources" (especially money, status and numbers) are dispersed among different entities in society. Dahl does not explain how he shifts from a discussion of inequalities in individual possession of money

and status as resources, to a discussion of inequalities in the possession of "numbers" as a resource. Individuals do not possess "numbers;" only aggregates of individuals defined by some social criterion can be measured in terms of "numbers" as a resource.

He argues that no one possesses money and status and numbers. For example, according to Dahl the upper class possesses more of one resource (money) but lacks "numbers." According to Dahl, while any one resource is dispersed unequally, yet taken as a whole, resources are distributed throughout the community: everybody has a resource. The basic problem with this analysis is that Dahl does not consider whether all the resources are of the same importance in terms of their practical affect on political life. The problem is to determine whether one resource is equivalent to another. For example, in one sense control over the media and a vote are resources but in what sense are they "equal"? The question of whether all resources are of equal importance is crucial to determining whether the dispersal of different resources makes any difference in formulating a theory of the distribution of power -- assuming for a moment that an exclusive focus on the latter involves an adequate discussion of democracy. Dahl states that no individual is absolutely powerless (or conversely powerful) in the sense that everyone has some "resource"

This however, is a meaningless statement. The relevant political question is the degree of inequality of power that defines the political system. Even in totalitarian societies -- as well as in our own authoritarian society -- citizens can perform certain acts which may help or hinder governmental policy.

Dahl exaggerates the "dispersion" of resources like control of industry and of money. He points out that a third of the labor force was employed by the eight largest employers. He then concludes that "collectively the large employers are too disparate for common action."<sup>(25)</sup> Underlying Dahl's assertion of dispersion is the idea that the employers do not share a common interest. Unfortunately he does not take up and analyze this crucial idea; he blithely states what he wants to believe. At this point he merely hands the student of politics a problem: to what extent do the employers identify as a common group in their desire to minimize labor costs and to increase profits? Whatever be their "disparaties" they also share basic concerns as employers of labor and as businessmen searching for optimal gains and favorable policies from the government, including perhaps a "hands-off" policy.

Dahl treats money as a single resource among many, seemingly as though "wealth" merely had a one-to-one equivalence with any other resource in political influence. But money can be used to gain political influence through several distinct means. Money finances electoral campaigns. Money can open up business

opportunities to politicians during or after a political career. Money as capital is an important value in this society. The growth and development of present day U. S. society depends on investment decisions by private economic groups, hence the political system has a "built-in dependence" on these economic elites. (26) Dahl's failure to discuss the multiple dimension of "money" and the integral role that specific forms play in our society seriously weakens his attempts to minimize the influence which it has on community decisions.

The confusion generated by Dahl's discussion of dispersed resources is compounded by his analysis of the genesis of multiple resources. Dahl argues that "popularity" has been "split-off" from "wealth". Yet there is no explanation of how "split-off" came about and why "split-off" should come about. We have many politicians who are "popular" in one of the senses that Dahl uses the term (to obtain a majority of the votes) and act in the interests of the wealthy. For example, New Haven's Mayor Lee redeveloped the downtown area for the benefit of wealth at the expense of lower income groups and yet obtained a high vote. It is possible under many conditions for wealth and "popularity" to be combined in contemporary U. S. politics.

#### The Power of Numbers

In his article discussion "power comparability" one of the key dimensions considered by Dahl was the "differences in the

bases of power." <sup>(27)</sup> In Dahl's account property ownership is more than counter-balanced by "numbers." He provides little empirical evidence to show how "numbers" with the vote who are depoliticized by a political system that does not relate to their basic problems (getting a living, etc.) have comparable influence with an economic elite which controls the means of production, is supported by the educational system, the mass media and political decision makers and which shapes the physical features of the community through its decisions on investment, growth, and employment. Dahl utilizes formal concepts devoid of substance and improvises ad hoc explanatory devices like "potential power" in order to avoid a discussion of the powerlessness of numbers. If we were to make Dahl consistent with his improvisations we would say that the U. S. or New Haven are "potential democracies." When the "numbers" became aware of their social interests and are activated and intervene in political life, the present pseudo-democracy will become real democracy.

The control and domination by the business class and the wide circulation of its values is a deep-rooted and pervasive factor of American politics. This is true even in communities with strong labor unions. Form and Miller's study of "Steelport" is illustrative. They found labor somewhat less than an effective counter-weight to business.

Labor's influence... still lags. Power is least developed in mass communications, city municipal boards and city government. Without control of the municipal elective offices, labor's penetration into the community power structure will be limited. (28)

They ascribe labor's weakness to three factors. (1) Nonpartisanship of the local elections makes it difficult to conduct partisan campaigns acceptable to middle status groups. (2) The mass media of communications, which are conservative, are quick to stigmatize Labor's political interest as partisan. (3) Labor's drive for respectability in other community areas has decreased its community visibility to the rank and file. This, combined with a weak self-identification to begin with among the working class, produces apathy toward the problem of the community power structure. (29)

Contrary to Dahl, rather than being a sign of strength, the adaptation of the labor bureaucracy to middle-class society has weakened the labor movement and made it an ineffective political and social force for achieving social reforms, especially those affecting the lower class.

Numerical strength is not a sufficient condition in defining political power for a group. Equally important is what the "numbers" know about themselves; whether numbers are situated in a political context where they can raise the issues partial to their interests; whether information conducive to forming a sufficiently cohesive outlook around the interests which numbers share can be disseminated

(the conservative mass media counteract this effort); whether the individuals occupying the policy-making offices of the organizations controlling "numbers" share the concerns relevant to their constituents' interests. There are numerous cases of leaders of numbers who are more interested in adapting to the dominant groups in society, who blur over problems and weaken the self-consciousness of the "numbers" as a group sharing common problems.

Martin Seymour Lipset, like Dahl, ascribes political power to mere numbers and the vote. In his introduction to T.H. Marshall's collection of essays, Class, Citizenship and Social Development, Lipset makes Marx a forerunner of his position:

. . . On the left, Karl Marx himself became an early exponent of the proposition that in a political democracy the right to vote means a significant share in power. As he put it in discussing Britain in 1852, for the 'working class, universal suffrage means political power, for the proletariat forms the great majority of the population. . . (30)

What is revealing about Lipset's quote from Marx is what is left out. (31) In the full passage, Marx wrote:

. . . But Universal Suffrage is the equivalent of political power for the working class of England where the proletariat forms the large majority of the population, where in a long, though underground civil war, it has gained a clear consciousness of its position as a class, and where even the rural districts know no longer any peasants but only landlords, industrial capitalists (farmers) and hired laborers. (32)

In this passage, Marx reveals a much clearer and sophisticated notion of the conditions for working class power than either Lipset's or Dahl's simple-minded ideas concerning the vote and "numbers." For Marx, workers with an understanding of their interest as members of a collectivity and sharing and expressing that common understanding, are the basis of power.

### The Social Context of Power

By utilizing apparently "inorganic," "neutral" terms from physical sciences, i. e., "resources" and "responses," to study society Dahl dissolves the command relations which are so much a part of the governance of the corporate world. He reduces qualitative differences to quantitative ones. Dahl attempts to resolve the problems of control by making an inventory of activities and possible activities that various groups engage in or could engage in, without considering the fact that some "groups" already control decisions affecting the vital concerns of others. It is precisely by studying marginal issues (to both the elite and the mass) that he can even consider putting the act of "voting" on the same plane with controlling the corporate-industrial structure of a community -- without appearing totally absurd. The difference in influence between an assembly line worker or even a collection of such workers in present day New Haven and a corporate executive in terms of decisions affecting each others' lives is enormous.

The material consequence of their disparate positions in terms of the benefits that accrue not only for themselves but for their children is also qualitatively different. "Quantitative reductionism" results in falsely equating isolated and sporadic political activity (such as voting on a given day every few years) by lower income groups with the permanent and effective exercise of authority wielded by the executive. While Dahl concedes the inequality of individual citizens he argues that collectively, numbers -- the less wealthy, low status -- actually overcome this condition and are influential. The problem is that the gap between the "potential" and the "real" power remains. Dahl nowhere indicates that the poor struggle collectively with a common problem -- poverty-- that keeps them too preoccupied to participate in politics. He acknowledges this, (without integrating it into his discussion of the nature of the political system) and ascribes it to their family and personal preoccupation.

Dahl argues against a ruling elite by pointing out that the ruling elite "does not always get its way". However, this is not an argument that the "ruling elite" does not generally control the sources of power -- only that it must adjust to other social forces which demand accommodation. A ruling class that "gives in" to a trade union on a question of a five cent raise is not less the ruler of decisions affecting employment, investment, out-put, product design, distribution and relations with the government affecting

these decisions (in addition to owning the means of production and earning the profits). The fact that Negroes run for office and vote does not necessarily qualitatively change the racist nature of a society. The fact that the U.S. engages in terror bombing and napalming of hundreds of thousands of civilians in Vietnam and that citizens (including Senators) criticize that action does not mean that a ruling elite does not make the decision or that a "pluralist democracy exists." A study of the control over the permanent structure of authority is of a different order to a study of the outcome of specific decisions or a description of the existence of struggle.

#### IV. ON DEMOCRACY

##### Party Competition

In Dahl's concluding section, "Pluralist Democracy: An Explanation," "one key manifestation of democracy at work is party "competition": because there are two parties seeking to obtain political office Dahl argues (a) the voters have a choice (b) that problems and disagreements automatically find a response in one or the other party. Despite mass apathy and citizen disinterest, the parties are supposed to discuss, debate, and formulate policies which represent the diverse segments of the population.

However, in discussing one of the key issues, redevelopment, Dahl mentions in passing that neither of the two parties represented

a section of the community which was displaced. He writes, "those who suffered directly (from redevelopment) were a handful of small businessmen and several hundred slum dwellers without much political influence."<sup>(33)</sup>

Dahl himself points (in tautological style) to the absence of any significant difference between the two parties: "Because there is little basic disagreement over policies, the political parties do not divide the community into two warring sets of bitter end partisans."<sup>(34)</sup> This statement raises serious question concerning the nature of the party system: if these two organizations are similar on basic approach, why should they be thought of as "competing"? From the point of view of issue differentiation this can be considered a "one party system" which has two organizational expressions. If there are not two distinct parties, then what happens to voter's choice; what alternatives do the voters have?

A theory of democratic politics demands more than the mere existence of two organizations and the fact that they appeal to the electorate for votes and compete to take office; it involves a consideration of the program, ideology and interests which are represented. Dahl argues that the differences between the two parties in New Haven were based on the different social groups represented. His case was weakened, however, when a major group shifted its allegiances quickly and easily from one party to

another, as the businessmen did during Lee's third and fourth campaign. (35) The "competition" between the Democrats and Republicans appeared to be over who would capture the businessmen's support.

Because Dahl does not have a theory of social interest he lacks an over-all framework with which to measure the significance of the particular activities of the political personalities and parties which he discusses. Dahl writes as if "parties" and politicians could take any political position (of course Dahl always includes an ambiguous "insurance" clause: "within limits"), as if they were simply seeking to get elected and all that a group had to do was to have "power" and the politicians would do its will. This "empty vessel" theory of politics is never adequately tested against the contrary notion that parties defend social interests and social classes.

Dahl puts forth the notion that the "vote" and elections are sufficient for popular control of the political levers. He argues that "minority control by leaders within associations is not necessarily inconsistent with popular control over leaders through electoral process." (36) He goes on to assert (a) voters have "alternatives," when in fact he has pointed out that on all major issues the "two" parties are agreed; (b) that a "vote" be equated with support, when in fact this may indicate a "lesser evil" approach in the absence of other possibilities and the fear of greater harm.

Underlying Dahl's theory of democracy and pluralism is the idea that all classes in society effectively oppose policies adversely affecting their interests. Crucial to this central idea of the opportunities for opposition are his arguments for the dispersed distribution of resources and the accessibility of political influence. Both arguments are presented as a "built-in" throttle against dictatorship and for pluralism.

As we pointed out above, however, the possibilities of opposition based on the existing parties are quite limited. Legitimate "competition" is limited to political groups supporting all major features of the present socio-economic structure. Voters' "choice" is predetermined by the political party elite. The latter accept the hegemony of the private corporate executive in decisions affecting vast areas of public life. Opposition is directed through existing political channels toward minor and secondary issues. This severely limits the possibilities of realizing voters' needs (especially those needs not taken into account by the decisions of the corporate elite) within the present political system. Whatever opposition exists is directed to details of policy, even to a specific policy, but not toward the context in which policy is made. Voters as participants in this scheme of things become the captives of the existing party elites who accept the existing structure and functioning of society.

Bargaining, Opposition, and Reform

Dahl claims that greater democracy in contemporary New Haven is evidenced by a "pluralistic bargaining" system, as opposed to the "unified hierarchical" system of the earlier period, but his account of consensus within the present political stratum hardly indicates any difference; it is difficult to determine what Dahl might consider "non-bargaining politics." Negroes were not able to bargain to live in dilapidated shacks in a white working class area. The Italian working class "bargained" to maintain the white working class status quo. The businessmen "bargained" to have the whole downtown area "redeveloped"; several hundred slum residents were not able to "bargain" and were evicted in the process.

New Haven's "bargaining system" functions much the same way oligarchical client politics operate in many underdeveloped areas: votes are exchanged for immediate favors; the system is not challenged and the government promotes the interests of the economic elite in the same of general development. Dahl describes the process:

The politician starts by converting small favors into popularity, popularity into votes, votes into office, office into legality, legality into more, sometimes bigger, favors -- and these into greater popularity. In the process the politician may also perform favors for himself and thereby improve his income -- which he can then use to grant more favors. (37)



over-simplifications of public debate"<sup>(39)</sup> Dahl doesn't examine the possibility of this closed-door approach becoming a means for the elite to impose its own interests and possibly distasteful policies on the mass. Nor does he see any irony in political "representatives" turning into manipulative "legitimists" adept at handing out propaganda and public relations statements.

Dahl asserts that the public simply is not interested in politics, instead of considering "the low salience of politics in the life of the average citizen" as a possible effect of policies being decided behind closed doors. To what extent does the absence of public discussion of issues by the elite, the suppression of controversy, the manipulation of democratic rituals and symbols, etc., lead to mass apathy, ignorance, tolerance of inequality, and subservience to the socio-economic status quo on the part of the followers? If an ordinary citizen perceives that the issues concerning him will not be considered by the elite, then he is likely to give up trying to raise them for consideration. The behavioral approach identifies this apathy or acquiescence as certifying satisfaction with the system. Dahl's assertions again become rationalizations that buttress the authority of the elite.

Dahl does not attempt to integrate data on the pressures to conform into a theory of the nature of politics. The pressures in the U. S. political system to destroy diverse cultures, traditions, feelings, customs is not in accord with a pluralistic description.

In New Haven the process of indoctrination into nationalist values was frequently conducted by middle-class individuals. Instead of studying how cultural ties were undermined and guilt feelings aroused among the immigrants, Dahl poses the problem in terms of "immigrants who were desperately trying to become like Americans." (40) Melting pot conformity, flag waving, and hero-worship are incompatible with the self-reliance of classic democracy. Dahl chose not to discuss whether the attack on the national heritage of the immigrants by the natives made them insecure and subject to the most vulgar kinds of patriotism (the immigrant's tendency to overcompensate.) The blending of democracy and nationalism obscures the vital difference between the practice of a citizen criticizing the government and the nationalist supporting his country "right or wrong."

Nelson Polsby, a student and follower of Dahl, suggests that the extent to which those interested may, if they choose, involve themselves in the determination of community decisions is virtually unlimited. Polsby goes so far as to identify decisions affecting peoples' interests with those in which "people participate."

Decisions affect people's interests differentially and... people participate in those areas they care about the most. Their values eloquently expressed by their participation cannot... be more effectively objectified. It is, therefore, to be expected that decisions affecting groups marginally will attract only marginal attention and decisions affecting groups directly will attract their attention. (41)

Polsby ignores the reality of mass manipulation through the tremendous growth of propaganda which obscures many policy decisions, distorts and in some cases actually denies that issues exist. Polsby's simple-minded notion that people adversely affected by decisions will respond does not usually hold. People are badly affected by decisions, and are quite aware of it and yet do not respond; they may be too oppressed as is the case with millions of Negroes in the South; they may be fearful of losing the little they already have; they may feel that in the present circumstances they could not win. A political scientist should be aware of the fact that people's interests, especially in foreign policy affairs, can be seriously endangered by a "brinksmanship policy" without their being aware of it. Surely the destruction of the world is no marginal affair.

Dahl mistakenly assumes an automatic equilibrium view of politics, of grievances taken up, of unjust acts criticized. In the face of present United States political realities, of unlimited warfare and totalitarian destructiveness abroad and of police attacks on Negroes and students at home, Dahl grossly overestimates the dependability of the democratic creed and of the political stratum as the defender of democratic rights. (42) The classical view of democratic society emphasized the role of leaders as articulators of their constituents' needs, as well as the rational participation of the citizens themselves; the Jeffersonian view even acknowledged

the right to revolution. With the two parties today imposing a political strait jacket, with discussion confined to leaders who agree on all essentials, and with a "public" largely kept ignorant of the issues, one has a caricature of opposition in a democratic society. Assuming that Dahl has given us an accurate description of leaders and citizens, the "behavioral" method, noncommittally describing activities and attitudes, has been transformed into a normative judgment: Dahl merely pins the label of "democratic" onto whatever practices he finds, no matter how undemocratic they may in fact be.

#### Elitist Theory and the Democratic Creed

Dahl's unarticulated political theory is classical conservative (one may add, lacking the elegance of expression of a Burke): the masses are dangerous and not to be trusted in political activity; reason is the prerogative of the knowledgeable leaders who apply it to a society that is complex and mysterious; decisions should be based on "experience" (custom and tradition). Dahl attempts to rationalize elite rule by transforming political problems into technical and administrative ones. "Technical questions, subtle distinctions, fine matters of degree are shed" and "emotion rises and reasoned discussion declines"<sup>(43)</sup> as a result of appealing to the populace and challenging the establishment.

The elite is seen by Dahl as the guardian of democracy. (44)

It exposes injustice and criticizes appeals inconsistent with the "democratic creed." But as Dahl points out, the elite itself manipulates a dogma malleable to numerous interpretations to legitimize the gap between ideal and actual policy. Who, then, criticizes and checks the elite? Certainly not the masses, since even if they weren't depoliticized by the system, they would -- according to Dahl -- be more likely to violate the democratic creed than the elite. As we would expect, the elite is "responsible" to itself and the creed: "Because an appeal must take place in the face of criticism from legitimists and extensive appraisal by members of the political stratum, blatant inconsistencies are likely to be exposed." (45)

Dahl seems to believe that an invisible hand guides the polity: "How the professionals act, what they advocate, what they are likely to believe, are all constrained by the wide adherence to the creed that exists throughout the community." (46) The older notion of the "responsibility of the elected to the electorate" at least provided some popular control to a theory of democracy; there was a basis outside of the leaders and the dogma for changing the government.

At one point Dahl appears to overcome the blinders of pluralist dogma and to observe reality. He notes that the subjective responses of individuals are related to their objective position in society: "The

objective differences in individual situations are frequently so great that they largely explain why subjective differences arise. "(47)

Dahl mentions that these "objective" differences in New Haven include "being poor or rich, well-educated or uneducated, a professional man or unskilled laborer, living in a slum area or a middle-class neighborhood -- these are differences in objective situations of a more persistent and general sort that are likely to show up in a variety of ways over long periods of time."

Dahl then points out that "because of these specific and general differences in the objective situation in which individuals are placed, different actions of government affect different people in different ways and to different degrees." It appears that Dahl wants to say that the class structure is reflected in government policy. Dahl does not address himself to how government policy contributes to the formation of divisions of rich and poor, uneducated and educated. Nor does he determine the extent to which these differences are cumulative, i. e., rich-educated-professional-living in middle-class neighborhood. How does government policy contribute to the persistence and multiple ramifications of these inequalities? What decision-making group is responsible for these government decisions? Dahl avoids these questions and instead focuses on how these inequalities are maintained, legitimized and sold to the public over time with and without popular participation.

It would appear that Dahl is suggesting that a major factor determining the nature of political influence is one's position in society -- something quite different from the operations of a mythical "invisible hand" in a democratic society. The lack of visible alternatives, the depolitization of the culture by the elites, and the monopolization of issues would appear to minimize the lower class's access to resources, political confidence, and opportunities for using resources to achieve goals, and its estimate of the value of political struggle.

## V. METHOD AND VALUES

In spite of Dahl's maintaining the fiction common among political behavioralists that his research is value free, his approach is in reality imbued with value commitments. This can be seen when we examine the groups with whom he identifies in designing his study. He analyzes from the point of view of the "system" and its "stability" and not the needs of its members. Selecting out the problem of stability is as much a value judgment as excluding consideration of popular needs. In his discussion of the "metal houses," for example, the exploited Negroes were not asked what they thought of the attitude of the white Italians and their political allies who were keeping them out of the neighborhood. Nor did Dahl and his associates design an interview schedule which asked the Negroes what they

thought of the unsafe metal houses that were being built. Dahl apparently did not bother to interview a single Negro but painted a highly favorable picture (based on Dahl's subjective appraisal of the situation) of the anti-Negro lower class whites. Dahl's selection and presentation of a group's point of view, the subject matter Dahl considers relevant, the perspective from which the analysis is presented, all are value judgments and reflect on the political bias of the author.

The discussion of the redevelopment project raises similar problems. Dahl did not determine what were the attitudes of the evictees -- the slum dwellers and small businessmen. No data was presented to establish their lack of representation in the political system, their inability to resist the project. No analysis was made of why existing organizations failed to come to their defense. When value commitment causes empirical analysis to be highly selective of the attitudes and individual behavior presented, it undermines the scientific enterprise. The identification of the author with the current decision-makers, with their problems, with their approach to solutions and with the outcomes which they favor, makes this "selective empiricism" obvious.

The presentation of historical material is also highly selective. The exploitation of labor, the restrictions on labor organization, and entrepreneurial dominance are omitted from the account of historical development. The numerous attempts made by oppressed

groups to come to terms with a hostile environment and the repression by the state of these groups in favor of the economic and social elites are carefully omitted from Dahl's selective description of political history. (48) The ascendance of the entrepreneurs is thus passed off as part of the "democratization process." The idea that a new exploiting group had come to power is not considered. Nor is there any discussion or explanation of possible links between patricians and businessmen -- inter-marriage, overlap of economic and social interests, etc. -- that facilitated the peaceful transition of power.

Dahl tends to fall into the "great political man" fallacy. Because he identifies with the mayor and looks at the community through the eyes of the political leaders he tends to identify the patterns of influence from this perspective. In focusing his analysis on "political leaders" he magnifies their importance and understates the influence of the socio-economic processes that forge the polity in which decisions are made. By confining analysis of issues and decisions to those that enter government offices he limits the perspective from which to treat other issues and decisions emanating from other institutions which shape the community. By making a whole series of assumptions concerning the existing social structure and economic system and their relationship to the role of political parties in conserving them and excluding insurgents,

Dahl ends up studying decisions that only concern working out tactics to stabilize the status quo.

By incorporating the liberal ideology (or dogma) of "limited government" into his methodology Dahl ends with a study of politics that does not carry him beyond the confines of issues relevant to that ideology. This framework prevents him from asking some questions which might illuminate his discussion of political life in New Haven. Why and how is politics "divorced" from the vital concerns of people?" In what sense is someone a "citizen" without politics (a view that is logically and substantively incomprehensible to classical political theorists except perhaps for the Monarchists and Hobbesians, who also reduce citizenship to a perfunctory role in the polity)? The content of a traditional category like "citizen" -- as someone who is informed and a participant -- is emptied and replaced with new meanings derived from the actual behavior. This method has the limitation that its categories of analysis simply confirm reality; there are no criteria independent of the situation examined with which to criticize, analyze and evaluate the behavior. The distinction between what is and what ought to be ceases to exist: democracy is what is -- no matter if the polity has no citizens.

Empty formalism is linked with a methodology that locks description and value judgment in the immediate situation. This fusion of description and values becomes the ideology of the status quo.

Depolitized politics and elite decision-making predominates and is presented as the "realistic" view of democracy. The classical view in which theory develops to critically explore the gaps between the profession of creed and the actual performance of politics is presented as "idealistic" or mythical.

In discussing the nature of the ruling class the important question is not, as Dahl argues, whether the same person or "interest group" owns the major resources but (a) whether the individuals who own the major resources belong to the same class (b) whether they share common interests (c) whether they share an opposition to certain values, ideas, policies and practices.

The fragmentation of power is a result of choice of the unit of analysis (i. e., individuals). Dahl discovers fragmentation of power because he does not relate the "individual" or "group" decision-makers to the social structure and to collective social interests. For example, in Dahl's analysis of the control over information as a resource affecting influence he analyzes each media separately and focuses on the differences among the media, obscuring links between them (the common values) and their collective impact. The cumulative impact of resources supplying information of a similar variety is not integrated into the analysis. The fact that there are a number of different sources of information is less relevant to a theory of "competitive" democracy than the fact that they uphold the same values. "Competition" by sources

with the same outlook is less an indication of pluralism than it is an index of commercial rivalry for profits. The number of parties and politicians is not a good indicator of representativeness of issues and groups in the community. We first must define what the problems are in the community independently of the established representatives.

Dahl appears to equate solution of community needs with an inventory of existing groups. Implicit in this is a value judgment: that the institutional system is perfectly responsive to the needs of the community, that problems immediately generate groups and that organizations never outlive their usefulness to their constituents. These assumptions are unwarranted, as has been shown by other empirical studies which have uncovered problems that the group structure of society was not handling. (49) Dahl's values and commitments obfuscate an important area for empirical research.

August B. Hollingshead's study of the election of a Board of Education presents an alternative approach that highlights the undemocratic nature of American society. In the composition of its members and the control and policy of the Board, Hollingshead found that property and business groups dominated. The author indicates that specific economic and political interest were being serviced: "Evidence derived from personal interviews showed

that the members of the Board of Education for more than a generation have been concerned primarily with two phases: operating the schools as economically as possible and seeing that teachers conform in the classroom and in their personal lives to the most conservative economic, political, religious and moral doctrines prevailing in the local culture."<sup>(50)</sup>

In contrast to the Hollingshead study, Dahl does not detach himself sufficiently from the ideology, ritual and organized groups of New Haven. He does not ask whether the institutions are responding to human needs. By focusing on the problem of human needs, the social scientist can objectively determine whose needs are met and whose are not. The social scientist can then explore what there is about political and social institutions that makes them alien to popular needs.

Because municipal government cannot deal with issues of major importance to key social groups, issues selected to study on the municipal level will tend to be those of marginal concern to specific local groups. Even assuming that one could measure the power of social classes by examining local issues, the issues selected by Dahl did not even meet the criterion that he set, namely that power can only be determined by a conflict between two groups. The issues selected did not show the differences in influence because there were no overt conflicts by which one could

measure success or failure of any group and hence its influence.

The issue of urban re-development is an example. Since the issue appears to benefit major organized groups and since established groups were not attacked or hurt there was no conflict; "influence" tended to be dispersed among the beneficiaries or "front men." This is not a measure of "who governs" but a manual of "how to govern," i. e., by seeking issues which the organized groups can support. If one would like to measure influence, an issue that would generate conflict, like the shorter work week, would be more appropriate.

Dahl's method of selecting issues is to choose to study issues considered by the political elite and in accordance with their norms of stable society. Unfortunately for Dahl and the political elite, society does not always run according to their agenda of issues. Frequently conflicts and the problems which generate issues are politically latent but profound and widespread. Such apparently was the case in New Haven with unemployment, low wages, slums and ghettos for Negroes. The attempt should have been made to relate the functioning of the political system to these problems and to explain why they appear as "non-issues" to Dahl and the political stratum.

Methodology blends with ideology. Because Dahl selects issues relevant to the political stratum and omits asking exploited groups what they consider as relevant issues, his findings (on

participation, etc.) reflect the interests of his "reference group" (the political stratum). The "findings" and the selective method which produces them subsequently buttress Dahl's views of the importance of the political elite for what he refers to as pluralist democracy and the norms which facilitate their activity in pursuits of their interests.

Dahl's selection of problems itself was laden with value judgments. It is not surprising that Dahl did not attempt to study the reasons why "numbers" have no "influence" to get out of the slums, ghettos, etc. Instead his concern was to study the "consensus" that perpetuates this condition.

There are serious methodological problems not only concerning problem selection but also regarding data selection. In his discussion of influence in redevelopment no questions are designed to elicit information on who benefited (profits, increased earnings, etc.), who was evicted, displaced, and who paid the cost proportionate to the benefits received. Dahl selected for discussion the descriptive facts which indicated a favorable outcome for the dominant organized groups. Dahl omitted a detailed description of why "numbers" were unable even to make an issue of their eviction and of their condition consequent to "urban removal." Dahl could have asked the several hundred what they thought of their eviction and why they were not able to prevent it. The selections and omissions

in presentation appear to be dictated by Dahl's identification with the dominant groups who set the problems, define the solutions and perform the rituals. Dahl's peculiar blend of fact and value is evident in the major theme of his New Haven study -- democracy. Dahl assumes that in New Haven "democracy" is an operating system while he states that he is simply examining events and phenomena to test its existence. If one assumes what 'one sets out to prove' then one can never be disproved by the findings: the data no matter how unmanageable will be made to conform to the exigencies of the prior assumptions. It is not surprising then that Dahl manages to fit incongruous elements into his theory of democracy: the "elimination of deviants," the absence of mass participation, interest and awareness, the extension of patterns of racial segregation, the concentration of economic power in the hands of Big Business, the domination of decisions by elites which share a common point of view and who decide public issues without open confrontations with the public, the suppression of issues that may antagonize economic elites but which benefit the lower class. (Dahl refers to issue suppression in terms of the politician's desire to maximize the vote by not antagonizing powerful, organized interest groups.)

By divorcing democracy from citizen involvement and voting from substantive issues, by eliminating the consequence of the



## FOOT NOTES

- (1) Who Governs, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1961.
- (2) We may note that Dahl changes his criteria for measuring power. In studying the earlier historical periods he uses the social origins of government officeholders, while in the contemporary period his prime criterion is participation in resolving issues. Since Dahl does not establish a relationship between the two measures of power, his comparative findings might be completely spurious.
- (3) Who Governs, p. 85.
- (4) Ibid., p. 15.
- (5) W. Lloyd Warner, Yankee City (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1963) p. 301.
- (6) Robert S. Lynd & Helen M. Lynd, Middletown, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1956) p. 421.
- (7) Ibid., p. 421.
- (8) Ibid., p. 434.
- (9) Ibid., p. 421-422.
- (10) Ibid., p. 415.
- (11) Who Governs, p. 244.
- (12) Ibid., p. 94.
- (13) Ibid., p. 192-197.
- (14) Ibid., p. 193 etc.
- (15) In discussing community power structure, the position of the Negro sub-community both as a part of the larger structure and as a distinct power structure itself has been studied. The Hunter findings of Negro subordination to white society in the North and the development of a similar but not identical power structure in the Negro sub-community are in line with the findings of Alison Davis et. al. in their book, Deep South. Maurice Stein in analyzing the Davis book concluded that "...one fact which emerges from the welter of data is the focus of all institutions in the community on the problem of keeping the Negro sub-community subordinate... The agencies representing community integrative interests, the courts, police, schools and newspapers... are committed to defend the whole program of caste privileges and are manipulated by the whites to guarantee that they do this." The findings of Deep South regarding the development of highly differentiated class structure within the Negro subcommunity was confirmed by Hunter. The point is obvious that the presence of individual Negroes in politics tells us little about how well the interests of the Negro community are represented.
- (16) Who Governs, p. 195.

- (17) Bulkeley Smith, "The Reshuffling Phenomenon: A Pattern of Residence of Unsegregated Negroes," "American Sociological Review, Vol. XXIV, (February 1959), pp 77-79.
- (18) Who Governs, p. 293.
- (19) Who Governs, p. 294.
- (20) Bulkeley Smith, op. cit. p. 77.
- (21) Who Governs, Robert Dahl, Behavioral Science, II, (July 1957), p. 202.
- (22) Robert Dahl, "Behavioral Approach in Political Science," American Political Science Review, (December 1961).
- (23) For a discussion of the role of the schools as agencies of indoctrination of conformity, see Dahl, p. 317 ff. Also Chapter 11, "Leaders in Public Education," for a discussion of the elite control over education, Dahl's assertions notwithstanding.
- (24) For a discussion of the control over the media, see Chapter 23, "Control over Sources of Information." Dahl's discussions of plural sources is totally unconvincing, as all the sources he mentions are basically pro-business. He finally resorts to arguing that the sources of information "really" do not influence because citizens are apathetic.
- (25) Who Governs, p. 250.
- (26) Dahl acknowledges one aspect of this social power of the capitalist class when he writes: "Probably the most effective political action an employer can take is to threaten to depart from the community... political leaders are likely to make frantic attempts to make the local situation more attractive" (p.250). Most of the time the city anticipates the needs of business and to avoid "threats," assumes responsibility for the owners, and makes decisions favorable to their profit-maximizing propensities.
- (27) "The Concept of Power", Behavioral Science, (July 1957), Vol II, pp. 201-202.
- (28) Delbert Miller & William Form, Industry Labor and Community (New York: Harper Co. 1960) p. 677.
- (29) Ibid.
- (30) T. H. Marshall, Class, Citizenship & Social Development, Doubleday-Anchor Paperback, Garden City, New York 1965 p. XII.
- (31) George Lichtheim like Lipset also omits the last part of the same sentence quoted from Marx. See Marxism (London). (New York: Praeger Publishers 1966) p. 99. The convenient omission of the last part of Marx's quote, thus deliberately distorting its meaning, in another example of the dishonest and corrupt scholarship spawned by the Cold War.
- (32) Karl Marx, "The Chartists", New York Daily Tribune, 25 August, 1852.
- (33) Who Governs, p. 244.
- (34) Ibid., p. 191.
- (35) Ibid., p. 243.
- (36) Ibid., p. 101.
- (37) Ibid., p. 248.
- (38) Ibid., p. 320.

- (39) Who Governs, p. 321.
- (40) Ibid., p. 318.
- (41) "The Sociology of Community Power: A Reassessment," Social Forces, XXXVII (March 1959), pp. 232-236. While Dahl cannot be held accountable for the vulgarization of his approach by his disciples, the absurd lengths to which Polsby carries it is a logical extension of an unsound and inadequate approach.
- (42) Philip Selznick's excellent study TVA and The Grass Roots describes the use of the creed as "ideology" to defend vested interests. Grant McConnell (Decline of Agrarian Democracy) similarly traces the use of the agricultural extension agencies and the ideology of free education to mask the subordination of government institutions to big agricultural interests.
- (43) Who Governs, p. 322.
- (44) This viewpoint which holds that the elites are the mainstays of "democracy" and that the active participation of the masses is a threat is a thread that runs through the writing of many of the respected social scientists: besides Dahl, see Lipset, Stouffer, Smils, Hofstadter, Schumpeter, Almond, et. al.
- (45) Who Governs, p. 324-325.
- (46) Page 325. Dahl goes on to extend his invisible hand to creating leadership for popular discontent merely because it exists: "If a substantial segment of the electorate begins to doubt the creed, professionals will quickly fan the doubts." In real life of course on many issues substantial segments of the population have doubts and no great rush appears from the professionals. One can enumerate Negroes, the poor, consumers, taxpayers, anti-war groups, et. al., who have yet to feel the breeze from the professionals' fan.
- (47) Who Governs, p. 275.
- (48) See Warner's Yankee City and Jones', Life, Liberty and Property, for attempts to relate class struggle to U. S. politics.
- (49) Hollingshead and Redlich, Mental Illness and Social Class.
- (50) A. B. Hollingshead, "The School System," in Lipset and Bendix, Class Status and Power, pp. 185-189. Hollingshead and Redlich's empirical study of New Haven effectively refutes Dahl's notion that the institutions of that city are responsive to the needs of the community. In Chapter 4 "Class Status and Cultural Characteristics" and in Chapter 5, they examine the bottom stratum, whose problems are most acute and to whom the institutional system is least responsive. Examining key issues such as housing, education, job opportunities etc., they find that "76 per cent of the families were completely isolated from formal community associations", p. 128. See August Hollingshead and Redlich, Social Class and Mental Illness (New York: Wiley 1965).