THEORIES OF POWER IN AMERICA

--Richard Rothstein

In the last fifteen years, the study of power in America has been one of the chief occupations of social scientists. Many of the terms recently coined by them to summarize theories about who runs American society have become commonplace: the power elite, countervailing power, pluralist democracy, coalitions, interest groups, other directedness, and veto groups.

These new theories of power are attempts to replace the classical, "textbook" accounts of who runs America, for the classical acoounts now seem outdated.

The classical view holds that we live in a "representative democracy." We, the people, hold sovereign political power in America, and at every level of government elect our representatives to carry out our will. The answer to the question, "Who rules?" is easy for the classical view, we do, or at least the majority of us do.

If public power is held and exercised by the representatives of the majority will of the people, private economic power is also held by us, the consumers. Our preferences for goods cause prices to rise; when prices rise new firms begin to produce the popular products and soon, prices fall back down. This classical view holds that the problem of economic giants and monopolies is dealt with by government anti-trust regulation which preserves the competition of the market place. Thus, economic democracy is also preserved.

This--representative democracy and free-enterprise competition--makes up the classical view. But it has long been obvious that these explanations of power in America are far from accurate. We, as individual citizens, and 180 million people like us all over the country, know that we don't make the major political and economic decisions. And we don't feel as though we are even a small part of the process of making them. "What do we have to say," we ask ourselves, "about the big issues of today--about whether to build an anti-missile system, bomb North Vietnam, or expand Medicare; about whether to expand McCormick Place or have an Illinois minimum-wage law passed; about whether to lower food prices, or issue Mid-West Bank Cards?"

Many social scientists noted that Americans may feel powerless despite their "democratic" system; the traditional democratic tools seemed

not to be doing their job. Elections had become less and less issue-oriented, and besides, the sisues had become far too numerous and complex for many of the candidates to understand them, much less the voters. Even more obvious was the fact that our "Economic democracy" no longer existed. Large industry still had great market power to dictate production and price levels, despite the anti-trust laws. And how does our theory of economic democracy square with the substitution of "product differentiation" (claiming Post Corn Flakes taste better than Kellogg's)? Does the consumer Kellogg's taste different when he buys Post's in the way he used to be able to make Kellogg's lower its price when he bought a cheaper brand?

In the fifties, therefore, social scientists began to wonder about who really does have the power to make decisions in America today. Who wields the power if the people (as voters and as consumers) do not?

As we shall see, many of the social scientists came up with the answer that really, we all still have the power, although we don't realize it all the time and we exercise this power in a somewhat different way than the classical method. This theory, which has many forms, is broadly known as the theory of pluralist democracy.

Other theorists announced that we the people don't really have any power at all. The decisions, they said, are made by a handful of top men from the largest corporations, from the military, and from the top government leaders. This theory is known as the theory of the power elite.

The battle between these two theories still goes on today, with skirmishes being fought in most of the major social science journals as well as in many university classrooms across the country. It is impossible for us to understand power in America without trying to understand how social "scientists" could arrive at such opposite explanations of the same phenomenon: power in America. And in the course of comparing these two theories, we may learn a great deal about how social science works.

In the first place, we must recognize that we cannot entirely separate the political viewpoint of the power theorist from his theory. This is not because social scientists are dishonest, but because the data of social events is so great that every theory must pick and choose among the data for that which "fits." There are many criteria for choosing some data to study and not others. But social scientists have come to recognize that one of these criteria will inevitably be the values (or viewpoint) of the investigator.

This is particularly true for students of power, because theories of power are part and parcel of political programs. Given the fact that most of us believe in democracy, if we have a theory which says that a power

elite runs America, we are likely to fashion a political program to take power away from the elite. But if our theory tells us that this country is as close to a democracy as a modern industrialized nation can get, then we are likely to be found defending the status quo.

Since this is the case, it is neither surprising nor shocking to find that the reverse is also true: those social theorists (who are also citizens) who want to change America are likely to come up with a theory about the facts which supports their desire for change--a power elite theory, for example. And those citizens who want to keep America basically the same will (as pluralist theorists) arrive at a theory to show that America is a democracy, so no change in power relations is needed.

And let's face it: your choice between the various theories of power will in part depend upon how much, or how little, you wish to change America.

A good example to start with is John Kenneth Galbraith's theory of countervailing power, published in 1952. Galbraith was concerned with economic power, but his theory of countervailing power has been taken over by pluralists to show a balance of power in the political sphere as well.

Galbraith examined the market place and noted that large corporations were no longer restrained by competition as in the classical model. But corporations in America are restrained, he said, by other corporations or economic groups across the market table. Whenever an economic unit (like a corporation) develops strong market power--the ability to dictate price and production levels to its customers--its customers have an economic incentive to band together to form an equally strong unit to make the bargaining equal. This ability to counter-bargain against those with strong original market power, Galbraith called "countervailing power."

For example, says Galbraith, at one time Kellogg's was so much stronger than any corner retail store that Kellogg's could set the price of Corn Flakes and the retailer had no choice but to accept. There was no other corn flakes producer willing to offer a lower price. But this situation gave consumer cooperatives and such chain stores as A & P an economic incentive to grow. Soon A & P was large enough so that if Kellogg's would not come down in its price, A & P could package its own brand of Corn F Flakes; so usually Kellogg's would come down. Through this struggle between one great selling power and another great buying power, the consumer was protected. And thus, although we no longer have the classical economic democracy of free choice and competition, we have something which is at least second best, says Galbraith: the balance of countervailing powers. We, as consumers, don't choose, but our interests are nonetheless protected.

Similar explanations have been advanced to describe the growth of counter-lobbies to original lobbies in Congress, and to describe the competition of competing interest groups over local government policies. Countervailing power is one of the mainstays of pluralist theories of power.

A good place to examine the value preconceptions (or political viewpoint) of this theory is in Galbraith's analysis of labor relations. Strong purchasers of labor (industry) provide an incentive for the sellers of labor (workers) to band together so that they can bargain equally with their employers. Through this mechanism, says Galbraith, a balance is reached where the great market power of industry is confronted with the great countervailing power of labor unions. With the development of strong unions, the employer can no longer find labor elsewhere if his workers refuse his offer; he must continue to bargain until a satisfactory arrangement is reached with his strong opponent: organized labor. Labor, Galbraith says, only has an incentive to unionize until he has countervailing power equal to the employer's market power. This is why the strongest industrial employers (steel, auto, mining) are faced with the strongest unions, whereas weaker employers (textiles, shoes) are faced with weaker unions. In a widely dispersed industry like textiles, Galbraith believes, competition still guarantees a certain amount of economic democracy and countervailing power is not necessary.

It should be obvious how this theory of countervailing power contains the presumption (common to most pluralist theories) that things in America are generally fair and not in much need of change. For isn't that all that it means to say that the countervailing power of labor unions is equal to the great market power of industry? If you believe that the last steel settlement was fair, reflecting democracy equality between workers and management, then the Steelworkers had countervailing power to industry. But what if you thought that the last Steel settlement was far too high and inflationary? What if you thought (as many industrialists still do) that the Steelworkers' union is far too powerful, holding a monopoly over the labor supply, and should be made subject to the anti-trust laws? On the other hand, what if you thought that the last Steel settlement was far too low and exploitative? What if you thought that it is wrong for profits to far outdistance wages, and that the government wage-price guidelines were a trick to hold down wages while letting profits rise.

If you thought any of these things, you would not be likely to accept the view that labor and industry have countervailing power. What to one man seems like unchecked monopoly to another seems like labor hooliganism. To Galbraith, it looks like countervailing power.

It is obvious that the three views of labor power we just referred to could have no way of coming to agreement about the fact of power. For

there is no available measurement of power to use as a test. Unions could not be put on a scale to find out if they had too much, too little, or just the right amount of power. Whether one agrees with Galbraith that union and management have equal power, depends not on any measurement of power but rather on whether you think labor and management benefit equally from the bargaining process.

It is not surprising therefore, that most of the scholarly debates about power in America have not been so much over who has the power as they have been over how you go about measuring power itself. Much of the experimentation with such measurement has been undertaken in cities like Atlanta, New Haven, and Chicago; but the conclusions of the investigators fit into the larger networks of pluralism or elitism in America as a whole.

The trend started in about 1950 when Floyd Hunter, a member of the "power elite" school, studied power in the city of Atlanta. Hunter reasoned that power can't be very mysterious since it is exercised in human societies about human relationships; the best way to measure who has power is to ask people who know. So Hunter began asking, "Who runs Atlanta?" He asked the Community Council to name the most powerful business leaders; he asked the League of Women Voters to name the most powerful government and political leaders; and he asked newspaper editors to name the most powerful leaders of Atlanta's society life. Then Hunter submitted these lists to a representative panel of fourteen knowledgeable judges. The panel included young and old, men and women, businessmen and professionals, whites and Negroes. The panel chose from these lists the forty most powerful men in Atlanta.

Twenty=three of the forty were businessmen, top executives of Atlanta's major industrial, financial, and commercial establishments. Four were from government (the mayor of Atlanta was one); five were lawyers, two were labor union officers, one was a dentist, and five were "leisure personnel."

Hunter then proceeded to interview each of the forty to find out how each had risen to his position of power and how he went about exercising it. He also asked each leader to name the most powerful of the forty leaders, the one they would go to if a really big decision about Atlanta had to be made.

Hunter found that the most powerful of the forty were businessmen and lawyers; and a large number had "ascriptive" (inherited) rather than "achieved" (self-made) power. (Hunter tells one amusing story of a business executive in Atlanta who started as a shipping clerk in a company owned by his father; within two years he had risen to the position of director in charge of one of the company's subsidiaries and eventually became

president of the company. But Atlanta's newspaper solemnly reported that this man "had worked his way to the top.")

Hunter also found that Atlanta's leaders tended to live in the same exclusive residential neighborhood and were members of the same luncheon clubs and social clubs. They tended to consult with each other rather than with men outside the top forty about major Atlanta decisions (such as a new city redevelopment plan, or a plan to build a new hospital in Atlanta).

Another discovery of Hunter's, however, was that though the decisions about major projects were made by the forty (or by the top ten of the forty), these forty were not usually associated publicly with executing the decisions. Common practice,was, according to Hunter, for the top business leaders to agree on a plan; then the mayor would raise the idea and get credit for it; and then younger executives and professionals in the firms and civic organizations controlled by the top leaders would begin to bring up the idea in public and mobilize community groups in support of it. These executives, professionals and politicians on the lower levels of power, would differ from issue to issue, according to Hunter, so that it would seem that one group was responsible for the hospital plan, another for the redevelopment plan, etc. But in reality it was the group of forty which was behind every big decision in Atlanta.

Hunter quoted the President of a large yarn manufacturing company who described how a decision to bring an International Trade Council to Atlanta was made.

> Charles Homer (chmn. of the board of a large Chemical company) gets an idea. When he gets an idea others will get the idea. He called in six of us and he talked briefly about his idea. We do not engage in loose talk about the "ideals" of the situation. We get right down to the problem;that is, how to get this Council.
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> All of us are assigned tasks to carry out. I have a group of friends that I will carry along. Everyone else has a group of friends he will do the same with.
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> When we meet at the Club at dinner, Mr. Homer makes a brief talk. He says he is willing to put $10,000 into it. Others throw in $5,000 to $10,000 until soon we have pledges of the money we need.
>
> We went into that meeting with a board of directors picked. And the executive director was named, a third string man, a fellow who will take advice.
>
> After the matter is financially sound, then we go to the newspapers and say there is a proposal for consideration. The chamber of

commerce committees and other civic organizations are brought in on the idea. They help to get the Council located and that's about all there is to it.

The power structure of Atlanta, Hunter concluded, was dominated by an elite of largely business interests. This elite backed a political understructure with the understanding that the city (and state) would have a taxation system favorable to corporations, an anti-labor policy, a restrained health, education, and welfare program, and racial segregation.

Thus, the individual in Atlanta has no voice in policy determination, according to Hunter. And even the "understructure"--the professionals, the politicians, the smaller businessmen--may not speak out on policy until after it's settled, and then only favorably. Their proposals are usually filed away and ignored because action results only when a plan fits the relatively narrow interests of the policy makers.

Hunter's study of the Atlanta power elite has come under great criticism from the competing pluralist theorists. The criticisms, of course, focus on Hunter's methodology, the way he went about examining power.

To ask people "who runs Atlanta?" say the pluralists, is a loaded question. It would be impossible to study power in a democratic community with such a question. For when an informant is asked such a question he is not likely to reply "the people run Atlanta;" or "the voters" or "lots of people share in running Atlanta." Therefore, say the pluralists, Hunter's method is self-fulfilling. The question implicitly asks people to assume that there is a power elite and to answer the question as though a power elite exists.

Furthermore, the pluralists say, even the most democratic community has gradations of power; nowhere does every member of a community have exactly the same power. Even in ancient Athens, the symbol of complete democracy, you could have ranked every individual on a scale according to his power and then discovered who were the forty people at the top of the scale. The fact that there are forty people in a city who have more power than thenext forty does not mean that the city has a power elite which is undemocratic. Unless we can actually show that most policies in the city are rammed through by the forty over the protests of everyone else, the city does not have a power elite.

According to the pluralists, Hunter and C. Wright Mills (who coined the term "power elite") confuse the potential for power with the exercise of power. The fact that the military could, if they wanted to and knew how to, take over the United States, does not make the Joint Chiefs of Staff a dictatorship. The businessmen Hunter described probably could have ruled

Atlanta, but they probably didn't want to; and even if they did, they might not have been able to agree on how to run the city. In any event we'll never know, since Hunter did not examine enough concrete Atlanta decisions for us to discover how much businessmen did or did not agree on a broad range of public decisions.

Consequently, say the pluralists, the only way to study power in a city is to study the details of a series of different kinds of decisions made in that city. We must look to see who participated in the decisions, who pressured those who participated, what influenced their participation, and why others did not participate. And we must compare those who participated in one decision with those who participated in another, to see if the same power elite makes all decisions.

Robert Dahl, a political scientist, did just this in New Haven, Connecticut. So did Edward Banfield in Chicago. Both men studied a number of public decisions and found that those participating in one decision generally differed from those participating in another.

Dahl studied New Haven's political party nominations, its public education system, and its urban renewal program. He found that in each of these areas, the mayor made most of the key decisions. In the urban renewal area, however, he found that the major commercial, industrial, and financial leaders (whom Dahl called the Economic Notables) were fairly active--they did not pressure the mayor into his urban renewal campaign but the mayor could not have accomplished it without their support. This was also true, though, of the major religious, organizational, and labor leaders who supported the mayor's program. Dahl also noted that the mayor was re-elected overwhelmingly each time he ran on the urban renewal platform.

In public education, Dahl found that, again, the mayor and other public officials (school board and school superintendent) made most of the major decisions about school appropriations and teacher's salaries. But organizations of teachers and parents had a great deal to do with the decisions, because the mayor kept them clearly in mind whenever making a school decision.

And in party nominations the mayor (as party leader) was still the main decision-maker, but he could not afford to make decisions in this respect without considering the desires of the main ethnic groups and other organized pressure groups in New Haven.

In Chicago, Banfield analyzed six controversies in the late 1950's: whether to build a second branch of Cook County Hospital, whether to merge the city and county welfare departments, how to finance needed improvements for the CTA, whether to build a civic center and housing development on the

bank of the Chicago river, where to locate the Chicago branch of the University of Illinois, and whether to build McCormick Place.

Banfield found that the main participants in these controversies were the heads of various organizations which stood to gain or lose from the proposed projects. These included public bodies (such as the Forest Preserve District and Cook County Hospital), private institutions (such as Michael Reese Hospital), private associations (such as the Urban League and the Welfare Council), alliances of businessmen (such as downtown hotel owners, or North Loop Department stoor owners), and individual business organizations themselves (such as the Chicago Tribune).

However, Banfield noted, because government organizations with power put these proposals into effect and are so decentralized (separated and formally independent like the City Council, the Cook County Board, the Forest Preserve District, the State Legislature, the governor, the mayor, the President of the County Board, the Sanitary District, the Trustees of the University, etc. etc. etc.), nothing can happen until the informal head of all these bodies decides to take action. This informal head is the leader of the Democratic machine. He (who is usually the mayor) waits until all the private organizations, associations, businessmen, and government units have fought out the issue among themselves and reached some agreement or compromise. Then the mayor steps forward and implements (and often takes credit for) the back-room agreement.

The data of Dahl and Banfield have provided the basis for one of the main strands of pluralist theories of power. Although technical political scientists would find great distinctions between the analyses and methods of Dahl and Banfield, we can consider them as one theory, whose main elements are as follows:

1. The notion of dispersed inequalities. There are many ingredients of power, say the pluralists. Political skill (such as a mayor might have), is one; others might be great wealth (of an Economic Notable), access to publicity, a following (of an ethnic politician), a great deal of time to spend on an issue, knowledge, control over a religious institution, etc.etc. But these ingredients, or political resources, are non-cumulative --they don't add up. A wealthy man is not necessarily politically skillful. Some people have one resource and some have others. But the fact that nobody is likely to have all these resources (or advantages, or inequalities) means that nobody is likely to monopolize all power. The great wealth of the businessman did not enable them to influence party nominations; and the ethnic connections and great time available for political work which the politicians possessed did not enable them to affect school policy. Nor did teachers have much to say about urban renewal.

2. The notion of reciprocal influence. When a leader has power

over the led, he understands in advance what things he will or will not be able to lead his followers to do--so the led also have power over the leaders. The mayor of New Haven could decide upon urban renewal only because he knew in advance that the voters would accept his decision. The voters, therefore, had reciprocal influence on the mayor even though they didn't really vote for urban renewal until after the mayor had started implementing it.

3. The specialization of influence. Different people are more interested in some issue areas than in others. Downtown department stores in Chicago were quite interested in the prospect of a civic center and development on the Chicago River but not quite interested in the pros and cons of a merger of the city and county welfare department. The heads of these stores probably could have influenced the welfare decision had they made a concerted effort, but this would have meant taking time (and therefore power) away from the decision areas in which they were interested.

4. Lack of unanimity of social classes. The pluralists contend that most of the issues which modern American cities face are technical or administrative issues on which members of the same social classes may have different opinions or interests. This has led one pluralist writer, Daniel Bell, to proclaim that we live in an age which has seen the "end of ideology," since there are no class positions on issues and each issue must be dealt with on its particular merits. Thus, Banfield points out that Chicago businessmen were split over the civic center development proposal: businessmen in the north of the Loop favored it but businessmen in the south of the Loop were opposed. Office building managers and lawyers from LaSalle Street were opposed, while some major real estate companies were in favor. Dahl points out that idealism may cause people to act against their economic interests: dentists, for example, have often supported fluoridation.

5. The maximization of political resources. All men naturally seek to maximize their resources for their own interests and desires. Men, according to the pluralists, act in much the same way as the classical business entrepreneur allocated his economic resources to maximize his profits. If there are so many glove manufacturers that glove prices go down, the businessman glove manufacturer (according to classical theory) will shift his men and machines into the manufacture of hats where prices are higher. Similarly, reasons Dahl, men use their resources (such as time, energy, friendships, etc.) in such a way as to maximize their goals (fame, ideals, standard of living). If a man is not active in politics (as most men are not), according to Dahl, this does not mean that others have a monopoly of power but rather that he is getting just what he wants in the private socio-economic sphere. If they feel that they cannot get what they want in the private sphere, then they begin to spend time and energy in

politics. For someone who wants to spend a lot of time and energy in politics, Dahl says, there is no power elite to stop him from entering politics. Thus, for example, teachers who don't normally bother to influence political decisions become very active when they want a salary raise and play a large role in political decisions. In a similar manner, Banfield argues that although only organized interest groups or associations can be part of the bargaining process for any issue that affects them there is no barrier to any group of individuals who have a stake in an issue organizing a group and participating in the bargaining process.

Some analysts have gone so far as to insist that pluralist democracy is the only social theory compatible with the American character and psychology. This is the analysis of David Riesman's well-known work, The Lonely Crowd. Riesman concludes that since Americans are becoming more and more "other-directed" (guided by a kind of radar which tells them to do what they perceive others like themselves doing) it is impossible for them to exist except in groups. Individuals no longer have opinions, says Riesman. There are only group opinions. Politics is a process where the various groups to which individuals belong veto any proposals which affect them negatively--so nothing much gets done and things go on pretty much as they have been. Says Riesman:

> These veto groups are neither leader-groups nor led-groups. The only leaders of national scope left in the United States today are those who can placate the veto groups. The only followers left in the United States today are those unorganized and sometimes disorganized unfortunates who have not yet invented their group.

In summary, the pluralists say that their examination of specific decisions in American cities shows many different sets (a plurality) of leaders, each having access to a different combination of political resources, each representing a different interest group or formal organization. The political parties which make the formal laws of the city do so in a very centralized manner (the mayor does not have to consult with his party before deciding) but this centralized decision-making is constrained by the nature of the political parties themselves--coalitions of different interests which can be held together only by satisfying each interest a little bit and always leaving room for unsatisfied interests to move into the coalition.

Who has power? Not an elite, say the pluralists, but all of us--only over the area in which we are most concerned; only if we care to take the time and energy to have power in these areas; and only if we organize in an interest grouping with others who care as we do.

Can this pluralist explanation of power in America be attacked as effectively as the pluralists attack the method of power elite theorists?

The fact is that it can and although most American social scientists are still wedded to the pluralist theory, some challenging questions have been raised:

1. As we saw in examining Galbraith's notion of countervailing power, one can say a balance of power exists only if one is satisfied with the situation. To say that a political party is a coalition of balanced interest groups is to imply without proof that all groups in the coalition get as much of what they want as do all others. The fact that an interest group participates in a controversy, or even that it compromises, does not prove that no power elite exists. Some groups are always able to force acceptance of their "compromises," other groups must always accept the compromises they are offered.

2. In examining only actual civic controversies, the pluralists ignore those areas where an elite may be so strong that no controversy even challenges it. For example, Hunter said that the elite imposed, as conditions of its support for the political coalition, a tax structure favorable to corporations, an anti-labor policy, a restrained welfare program, and segregation. If a pluralist studied Atlanta, and examined the decisions to establish a Trade Center, adopt a development plan, and build a hospital, he may have concluded that many groups participated in these decisions. But he would have ignored the fact that there was no controversy over tax policy and segregation, the areas where the elite revealed its power. And the fact that there was no controversy over segregation, for example, does not mean that there were no Negroes in Atlanta who cared enough about it to want to use their political resources for its abolition.

The pluralists' own point about "reciprocal influences" supports this critique. For if the mayor of New Haven only did what he knew in advance his electoral coalition would support, isn't it also possible that he did things only if he knew an elite would support them? Dahl concluded that New Haven was pluralistic after studying actual urban renewal decisions. But possibly the mayor never suggested, for example, that renewal be used to build extensive low-income housing rather than to renovate the downtown business district, because he knew that the business and financial leaders would never go along.

In short, pluralists examine controversial decisions whereas it may be non-decisions which reveal the power of an elite.

3. This leads to another criticism of pluralism: that it is concerned only with the "middle levels of power." Thus, the theory of countervailing power and balanced interest group coalitions works for Congress, which is becoming weaker and weaker, but does not work so well

for the Presidency, where more and more power is being concentrated. This is similar to saying that pluralists examine only relatively insignificant controversies rather than the conditions of a political system's stability (segregation or favorable corporate taxation in Atlanta, for example).

4. . Men are not like profit-maximizing businesses and cannot reallocate their "resources" that simply. It is quite a step from having a grievance to organizing an interest group, as any labor union organizer knows. Once the system of interest groups is established, it is very difficult for new interest groups to enter the system, contrary to the contentions of the pluralists. Galbraith's system of countervailing power, for example, takes no account of the millions of unorganized workers.

5. A power elite need not ram its proposals over the objections of a dissenting majority. It may control the means of communication and information so that people believe that the compromises their weaker groups are forced to accept are really the best that is possible. Many workers, for example, may believe that it is their wages which must be restrained to avoid inflation, and not industry profits.

6. The happy assurance of the pluralists that we can enter the political system and form an interest group any time we have a grievance contradicts the common sense knowledge that we all do feel powerless about the big decisions: we don't see how we can affect the missile race, or the War in Vietnam, or the minimum wage, or good prices.

If Floyd Hunter had asked people in New Haven and in Chicago, "Who runs your city?" he could have found a power elite. Dahl and Banfield could examine concrete controversies in Atlanta and prove that really Atlanta is a pluralist democracy.

Who, then, runs America? Who has the power?

We should expect that theorists will never agree on a single theory of power in America. For as we have seen, in a nation where everyone believes in democracy, every theory of power must either be an attack on, or a defense of, things as they are.

There is, of course, room for persuasion and proof. Undoubtedly, many who thought America was quite democratic were persuaded by revelations of Mills and Hunter that a power elite was at work behind the scenes. Undoubtedly, many who always suspected that the manipulations of a hidden elite were responsible for conditions were convinced by the pluralists that there really were no barriers to any dissatisfied groups which sought redress.

But just as there is room for proof, so there is room for doubt.

Virtually every political program has had, implicit in it, a theory of power. As long as men disagree politically, they will disagree on the facts of power.

There will always be enough facts available to enable us to pick and choose among them for those that fit into our goals, beliefs, and theories.

The pluralist and elite theories of power in America will improve and become more sophisticated as their proponents become more conscious and sophisticated about exactly what it is that they like or dislike about the American social, economic, and political structure.

You can help yourself decide which brand of theory seems true to you by asking yourself some of these questions:

--Are people inactive politically because they want to be that way or because they see no alternative?

--Do people decide their political positions on the basis of calculated interests and beliefs or because they are tricked by the mass media?

--Is the current distribution between wages and profits fair or unfair?

--Did we go to war in Vietnam with your "reciprocal" consent or without it?

--Are the interest groups and unions which represent you as strong or less strong than those which represent others in this society?

--Is every legitimate interest in our society represented by a pressure group or are there some legitimate interests which are unrepresented?

All of these questions can be, and are, argued incessantly. If you tended to choose the first alternatives, you are likely to find the pluralist theory of power more convincing. If you tended to choose the second alternatives, the power elite theory will seem closer to the truth.

And that's all the truth can be.

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