

CHAPTER 3

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out the conceptual framework of the thesis. The first six sections assess the advantages and disadvantages of different conceptual-theoretical perspectives, specifically evaluating the potential application of the institutional, discursive, political economy, public choice and power resources approaches. The first option available to the thesis was to employ one of these approaches. However, by applying one of these to the exclusion of the others, the thesis risks reproducing the gaps within, and deficiencies of, the existing research. The second option was to combine these approaches. However, this raised the crucial question of how to integrate these within a coherent analytical framework. The third option was to seek a new conceptual-theoretical framework that possessed such a capacity. The principal argument of this chapter is that the Coxian approach provides the required framework. Following a brief review of work that has adopted a similar approach, the seventh section introduces the main features of Coxian historicism and outlines the three-stage Coxian method of historical structures. The chapter concludes that Coxian historicism possesses the potential to address the five main gaps and other deficiencies of existing research, plus the capacity to provide a coherent analytical framework for studying the British Left's European policies.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The central research question is whether the European policies of the British Left changed over the 1945 to 2004 period and, if so, how and why? The theoretical point of departure is therefore policy. There are six possible ways in which to study this subject. The first is micro-level analysis of the policy processes and policy outputs of left-wing institutions (the institutional approach). The second is micro-level analysis of the British Left's discourse on European integration, and how it both shapes, and is in turn influenced by, European policies (the discursive approach). The third is macro-level analysis of the national and global context of policy-making (the political economy approach). The fourth is micro- and macro-level analysis of the supply and demand factors that shape policy-making (the public choice approach). The fifth is micro- and macro-level analysis of the power resources deployed during the policy-making process (the power resources approach). The sixth, which integrates and transcends these perspectives, is the Coxian approach.

3.1 INSTITUTIONAL APPROACHES

Abercrombie et al. (2000, p.180) defined institutions as complexes of ‘social practices that are regularly and continuously repeated, are sanctioned and maintained by social norms, and have a major significance in the social structure.’ Rooted in the Enlightenment values of reason and social progress, institutional approaches developed in the early post-war period as governments and other agencies enlisted the social sciences to help solve social problems. Early policy analysts viewed institutions as the principal agents of social change. Consequently, they became the primary focus of analysis. Furthermore, policy science was defined by Lasswell (1951, p.14) as ‘the disciplines concerned with explaining the policy-making and policy-executing process, and with locating data and providing interpretations which are relevant to the policy problems of a given period.’ For Lasswell (1948, p.122), these disciplines ‘are policy sciences when they clarify the process of policy-making in society, or supply data needed for the making of rational judgements on policy questions.’ Therefore, the prevailing view was that policy science should focus on problem-solving rather than critical analysis.

However, the dominance of the problem-solving institutional approach was short-lived. From the 1970s, a succession of critical institutional analyses, and the development of two new approaches (the discursive and political economy approaches) eroded the orthodox view. The contrast between problem-solving and critical perspectives is evident in Parsons’ (1995) survey of the five main types of institutional approach to policy analysis: policy-in-stages, pluralism-elitism, sub-systems, organisational and comparative. These approaches focus on the policy process and/or the policy outcomes of institutions.

Policy-In-Stages

Policy-in-stages approaches view the policy process as a series of steps, beginning with problem identification and concluding with policy evaluation. Easton (1965) and Almond et al. (1966, 1993) advanced black box-type models of the policy process with inputs and outputs. The normative-optimum model, devised by Dror (1968), focused on both the rational dimension to policy-making and the extra-rational dimension suggested by psychoanalysis and social psychology, whilst Cook (1985) advocated the application of multiple methods of analysis and the use of triangulation at each policy stage. However, Lasswell (1951, 1970) challenged the linear nature of the policy-in-stages model, arguing that the institutions and value systems within which policy-making and policy analysis take place should be considered when studying the policy process.

Pluralism-Elitism

Pluralist-elitist approaches focus on the distribution of power within the policy process and how this shapes policy formation. Pluralist models of policy-making, set out by Dahl and Lindblom (1953) and Lindblom (1959), were based on the assumption of an open liberal-democratic political system in which different policy actors operated on a level playing field. Schattschneider (1960) criticised this model, insisting that the elite systematically shaped the political system in its favour. He argued that all forms of political organisation had a bias in favour of the exploitation of some forms of conflict and the suppression of others, because organisation was the mobilisation of bias. In other words, some issues were organised into politics while others were organised out; the elite managed this process to ensure the inclusion or exclusion of certain issues from the policy process. However, Bachrach and Baratz (1962, 1963, 1970) argued that power was not just the control of observable behaviour and decisions, but also included the non-observable realm of non-decisions. Non-decision-making meant that policy-makers with power could effectively keep certain issues off the policy agenda. Crenson (1971) further developed these arguments with his claim that the dominant ideological system transcended and shaped the policy process.

Cobb and Elder (1972) focused on issue-formation, that is how an issue becomes an agenda item in the policy process, and posited a number of triggering devices which prompt the emergence of an issue. To be transformed into an agenda item, however, the issue must be of concern to decision-makers and the body politic, and must overcome the numerous elite strategies of containment. Lukes (1974) advanced a three-dimensional framework for analysing power in the policy process. The pluralist one-dimensional model focused on decision-making within an open political system. The two-dimensional model focused on decision-making, non-decision-making and the mobilisation of bias, whilst Lukes' three-dimensional model, successfully applied by Gaventa (1980), focused on the wider processes of thought control within which policy-making takes place.

Sub-Systems

Sub-system approaches analyse the policy process with reference to concepts such as policy networks, policy communities and sub-systems. The metaphor of a policy network or community is used to denote the pattern of formal and informal contacts and relationships that shape the policy agenda and decision-making. The concept of the policy network was first used by Hecló (1978) in his study of the US executive, whilst Richardson and Jordan (1979) and Smith (1993) applied the concept more widely in Britain and the US.

Rhodes (1981) and Benson (1982) analysed policy networks in terms of different structures of resource dependencies. Kingdon (1984) analysed the policy process in terms of distinct sub-systems or streams, specifically problems, policies and politics, the confluence of which determined whether or not a particular policy was implemented. Sabatier (1986, 1988, 1991), on the other hand, devised a wider conceptualisation of the policy sub-system. It included a wider range of actors attending to particular policies and problems, not just the formal decision-makers. However, the role of elite opinion, and the factors which help to change opinion over time, were key to understanding and explaining policy outcomes.

Organisational

Organisational approaches concentrate on the impact of organisational rules and structures on policy-making, as opposed to those that focus on the external environment, such as economic, social and other forces. Selznick (1949) proposed a structuralist-functionalist model to reveal how organisations were organic systems, in that they adapt to their external environment in order to maintain their existence rather than pursue the goals for which they were established. Di Maggio and Powell (1983, 1991) developed an isomorphic model to explain how organisations changed to resemble others facing similar conditions. Furthermore, they argued that once established, organisations were subject to the pressures of more powerful, well-connected and better-resourced institutions. March and Olsen (1984) insisted that to explain how and why a particular policy emerged, there was a need to analyse the structure, historical development, personal networks and decision-making history of that organisation.

Williamson (1975) and Stiglitz (1987) devised models based on transaction cost economics and the principal-agent theory to explain the policy process. These economic approaches attempted to explain the growth of MNCs and their internal division of labour. Skocpol (1985) sought to bring the state back into policy-making by stressing the role of the relatively autonomous state in the policy process. Hall (1986) also highlighted the importance of political institutions in policy determination, but took a wider view of which institutions should be considered. He favoured analysing the relationship between the state and society, on a local and global level, in addition to examining the role of the state. Weaver and Rockman (1993) developed a model in which policy outcomes were determined by the organisational constraints and decision-making attributes of the political system.

Comparative

Comparative approaches attempt to explain how particular policy processes give rise to different policy outputs. The hypotheses advanced by Hofferbert (1974) and Wilensky (1975) gave primacy to socio-economic forces. Similarly, the class analysis developed by Offe (1974, 1976, 1984, 1985) explained the policy process in terms of the forms of class struggle in different capitalist states. The neo-corporate thesis set out by Schmitter (1974) and Lehmbruck and Schmitter (1982) offered a model based on the patterns of business-government-labour interaction, where the state attempted to control the policy process by managing the key players in the corporate system. The governmental approach advanced by Castles (1982) stressed the importance of political parties and the partisan control of government to the policy process, whilst the organisational approaches of Hall (1986) and Weaver and Rockman (1993) focused on the role of the state and other institutions in shaping the policy process.

3.2 DISCURSIVE APPROACHES

Smith (1998: 343) defined discourses as ‘systems of representation that involve rules of conduct which regulate the production of meaning.’ The ‘cultural/discursive turn’ in the 1970s had a major impact on the social sciences:

In the last three decades, most of the disciplines in the social sciences have experienced a fundamental reappraisal of their basic assumptions, theories and methods. The most significant common feature of this reappraisal is the recognition that ‘culture’ deserves much more serious attention as an object of study in its own right and this has produced a reassessment of the linguistic, discursive and cultural conditions of social research. Social scientists have come to realise that many of the categories they use and apply make sense only within definite language systems and that academic communities themselves are involved in the construction and reconstruction of these language systems (Ibid. p.231).

This paradigm shift raises two fundamental and interrelated questions. Are cultural and discourse studies central to social science, or should they be studied alongside other dimensions? Is the world and our knowledge of it discursively determined, or is there an external reality? Although these questions have yet to be resolved, the contribution of cultural and discourse studies to the social sciences has been significant.

The linguistic and semiological work of Saussure (1916/1959), Barthes (1967, 1976) and Potter and Wetherell (1987) helped to inspire a generation of post-structuralists. Scholars such as Debord (1974), Foucault (1972, 1980), Williams (1983), Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and Habermas (1989) focused on the role of language and meaning in constructing and maintaining the capitalist system. Debord lamented the debasement of the human condition as capitalism reduced people to little more than spectators in a spectacular society. Foucault claimed that all forms of knowledge are related to social power relations. Williams claimed that transformations in the meaning of words are produced by changes in the material relations of society. Laclau and Mouffe criticised structural Marxism and attempted to synthesise postmodernism with Marxism to produce a new post-Marxist approach, whilst Habermas pointed to the need of the elite to construct and maintain the legitimacy of the capitalist system and the state. More recent work, by critical discourse analysts such as Fairclough (1989, 1992, 1995a, 1995b, 2000), van Dijk (1997a, 1997b) and Wodak (2001), has expanded into new areas such as the media.

Discursive approaches to policy analysis are concerned with discursive construction and reproduction, and how these impact upon policy formation. Parsons (1995) identified three main discursive approaches: linguistic, public opinion and propaganda.

Linguistics

Linguistic approaches suggest that, to understand policy-making, it is necessary to explore the construction of meaning, whilst recognising that language both frames and structures the policy process. Edelman (1964, 1971, 1977, 1988) analysed the use of language by policy-makers in terms of the manufacture and manipulation of symbols, whether referential or tangible. According to Edelman, the real power in policy-making is the power to construct and articulate social problems, where the problem is constructed to justify a certain solution rather than to solve it, and where these constructs tend to favour the status quo. Majone (1989) conceptualised the policy process as one of argumentation: that analysts working to influence policy seek to develop persuasive arguments. Hoppe (1993) characterised policy-making as the capacity to define the nature of shared meanings. These are translated into policy, and the intersubjective understanding of these policies effectively shapes the next cycle of meaning construction. Fisher and Forrester (1993) argued that policy arguments are selective and shaped by power relations.

Public Opinion

Public opinion approaches concentrate on the role of public opinion, as mediated by the media and other institutions, on policy-making. Lippman (1922) and Lasswell (1935) advocated the manufacture of consent of the governed to be governed, so as to prevent democracies from being overloaded by popular demands that disrupted the prerogatives of capitalism. Downs' (1972) issue-attention cycle highlighted the role of the media in agenda setting, whilst McCombs and Shaw (1972) and Cook and Skogan (1991) found a correlation between the saliency of an issue and its inclusion on the policy agenda. Rogers and Dearing (1987) argued that agenda setting was an interactive process; although the media shapes the policy process, policy-makers can also shape the media agenda.

Propaganda

O'Shaughnessy's (1990) propaganda approach focused on the efforts of elite interest groups to shape the policy process. He specifically discussed the programming of the policy process through the presentation of policy (marketing) and political manipulation (propaganda).

3.3 POLITICAL ECONOMY APPROACHES

Hettne (1995, p.2) defined political economy as 'the interaction of the market and the state, or, in different terms, politics and economics.' However, there are different approaches to political economy and different views on the relative importance of the state *vis-à-vis* the market. For these reasons, political science and economics have developed as separate disciplines. Although combining politics and economics is difficult, as Hettne (1995), Gill and Law (1988) and Strange (1988) argued, there have been four broad attempts at such a synthesis.

The first attempt was made by Strange (1970, 1988), who claimed there was a need to integrate international economics and international relations. Strange developed a model to analyse the effects of political authority, including states, on markets, and conversely, the effects of market forces on states. The model was based on four interlocking structures, security, production, finance and knowledge, which correspond with four basic human needs: wealth, security, freedom and justice. Strange's basic argument was that societies differ from each other in the emphasis they place on these different basic values. However, by her own admission, the model has two weaknesses: it was not clear which structures would dominate in any given situation, and the precise nature of the state was left unresolved.

The second attempt was made by a group of Marxist scholars. This approach, termed Open Marxism, emerged as a reaction to the abstract and ahistorical structural Marxism of Althusser (1969, 1970). Holloway and Picciotto (1978), Bonefeld (1992, 1995), Burnham (1994, 1995) and Holloway (1995) argued that the consequence of separating the economic from the political was to obscure the social class antagonism between capital and labour. By contrast, Open Marxism considers state-civil society relations as differentiated but connected forms of capitalist social relations of production. It called for a return to classical Marxist ideas about the relations between class, capital and the state. However, Bieler and Morton (2003) made four criticisms of the Open Marxism approach: its totalising and generalising nature, its elevation of capitalist reproduction over resistance, its failure to distinguish between different forms of states, and its state-centric analysis.

The third attempt was made by a second group of Marxist scholars. Dependency theorists and world systems analysts such as Frank (1967), Cardoso and Falletto (1971), Amin (1977), Wallerstein (1979), Blomström and Hettne (1984), and Hopkins and Wallerstein (1996) emphasised the development of capitalism as a global system, differentiating between a core of powerful states and a dependent periphery. Dependency theorists stressed the imperialist nature of modern capitalism, whilst world systems analysts focused on the cycles and trends in the world system over a longer time period. However, the dependency school was criticised for its failure to account for the rise of the newly industrialising countries in Asia and elsewhere during the 1980s. The world systems school was criticised for its 'tendency to undervalue the state by considering it as merely derivative from its position in the world system' and its 'alleged, though unintended, system-maintenance bias' (Cox, 1996, p.87).

The fourth attempt was made by a group of scholars including Poulantzas (1973, 1975, 1978), van der Pijl (1984, 1998), Cox (1987, 1996, 1997, 2002), Gill (1991, 1993, 2003) and Overbeek (1993). They developed a transnational historical materialist approach to the global political economy, building upon the work of Antonio Gramsci and others. Van der Pijl, Overbeek and Gill employed many of the ideas of Gramsci to study the restructuring of global capitalism and the reconstitution of an Atlantic ruling class under US hegemony. This restructuring is driven by structural factors, such as the internationalisation of finance and production, and by the agency of strategic actors such as MNCs, certain states and elite groups such as the Bilderberg Group and the Trilateral Commission. However, the most successful attempt to synthesise economics and politics was made by Cox, discussed in detail below.

Other political economy approaches to policy analysis were concerned with the impact of the capitalist mode of production and its class and power structures on the policy process. Miliband (1969) argued that the state was an instrument of ruling class hegemony over capitalist societies and that the ruling class dominated the policy process, shaping it in their interests. Poulanzas (1973) challenged this view, arguing that it was the structural power of capital, rather than any particular class, which determined the decision-making process.

Benson (1975, 1977a, 1977b) suggested that policy-making needed to be analysed in the context of policy sectors, composed of a cluster or complex of organisations connected by resource-dependency relationships. These can be analysed in terms of administrative structure, interest structure and the rules of structure-formation, where the rules of the latter effectively shape the administrative and interest structures by excluding certain issues, and by limiting the choice and behaviour of policy-makers.

Burrell and Morgan (1979), Salaman (1981), and Ham and Hill (1984), adopting a Weberian approach, analysed the 'deep' aspects of the policy process: unobservable processes and structures such as ideology, power and the mode of production. However, they also assigned a degree of autonomy to the 'surface' level of observable policy outputs. Ham and Hill argued that although the 'deep' aspects were essential to any understanding and explanation of the policy process, analysis should not be reduced to the kind of deterministic Marxist approach advanced by Clegg and Dunkerly (1980).

More recently, the propaganda model developed by Herman and Chomsky (1994, 2002) described how the Western media, underpinned by a guided market system, overwhelmingly served the interests of the state and big business. They provided empirical evidence to support their claim that the mass media, owned by big business, was consistently selective in its coverage and presentation of US policies, to the benefit of the ruling elite.

3.4 PUBLIC CHOICE APPROACHES

Public choice theorists analyse the policy-making process in terms of supply and demand factors. The primary concern is the motivations and rationale of administrative and governmental institutions, which increase their bureaucratic or technocratic power by serving themselves rather than the public interest.

Buchanan and Tullock (1962) focused on party political competition and its consequences for policy-making. Tullock (1965, 1976) argued that the study of bureaucracies, policy-making and politics should be based on a similar set of behavioural assumptions to those used to explain the behaviour of consumers and firms, namely the maximisation of self-interest most of the time.

Downs (1967) also believed that decision-making in bureaucracies was driven by self-interest. He identified 16 'laws' from three hypotheses: that officials seek to attain objectives rationally, that they are motivated by self-interest, and that the social functions of organisations are influenced by their internal structures and vice versa. He also identified several types of bureaucrats, who were driven by different motivations. Downs' objective was to produce a model of bureaucratic behaviour with predictive powers.

Niskanen's (1971) work was framed by neo-classical economics, unlike Downs' psychological-sociological model. He argued that bureaucracies, in contrast to companies, which are subject to market forces, sought to maximise their budgets and size irrespective of utility, and that this process was augmented by politicians who are pressured to make promises to increase public spending in order to maximise their votes at elections.

3.5 THE POWER RESOURCES APPROACH

Korpi (1983, p.21) developed a method of analysis that incorporated both the institutional and discursive dimensions of policy-making, arguing that 'it is fruitful to view politics as an expression of a democratic class struggle in which class, socio-economic cleavages and the distribution of power resources play central roles.' The power resources approach focused on class structure and the distribution and deployment of power resources by different classes, analysing how these shaped the policy process and determined policy outputs.

Korpi (1983, p.15) defined power resources as 'characteristics that provide actors, individuals or collectivities with the ability to punish or reward other actors.' However,

It is important to realise that power resources need not be used or activated in order to have consequences for the actions of other people. An actor with the ability to reward or punish need not always do so to influence others. Since every activation of power resources entails costs, it actually lies in the interests of power holders to increase efficiency in the deployment of power resources. This may be achieved through what we may call the investment of power resources. Thus, power resources can be invested through the creation of structures for decision-making and conflict regulation, whereby decisions can be made on a routine basis and in accordance with given principles. Investments of power resources can be made in institutions for conflict resolution such as laws, ordinances and bureaucracies, in technologies, in community and national planning, and in the dissemination of ideologies.

Korpi applied his approach to the post-war development of left-wing political parties, trade unions and the welfare state in Sweden.

3.6 INSIGHTS AND LIMITATIONS

The application of any one of these approaches would illuminate different aspects of the subject. Applying an institutional approach would facilitate a comprehensive and detailed analysis of policy processes and policy outputs. The British Left consists of a wide range of institutions, from political parties and trade unions to pressure groups and think tanks, which possess different histories, objectives, ideologies and levels of democratic participation. An institutional approach would highlight these differences, which, in turn, could help to explain policy variations and policy changes. However, an orthodox institutional approach would focus on the ‘surface’ rather than the ‘deep’ level of the policy process; in other words it would analyse the actual policy rather than the structural forces that shaped it. As such, it would neglect the discursive and political economy dimensions. Even a critical institutional approach, which included an analysis of the ‘deep’ level, would struggle to effectively establish the link between the two levels without an overarching analytical framework.

The academic debate about the centrality of discourse aside, business and political elites have long recognised the importance of propaganda, also known as public relations or ‘spin’, or in academic circles as agenda setting, to governing the capitalist system. As such, a discursive approach to the subject would be necessarily critical, and long overdue. Such an approach would identify the key power differentials within institutions, specifically the power to limit the debate and set the policy agenda, thus shaping both policy processes and policy outputs. It would highlight the impact of concerted propaganda campaigns on policy, and could be used to explore the influence of the wider discourses on the British Left’s European policies. However, an exclusively discursive approach to this thesis would be too ambitious, given the range of actors and the time scale. The sheer volume of data generated by such an approach would invite either a selective analysis of the subject, raising the problems of representation and bias, or an analysis based on abstract and vague generalities. Furthermore, without a political economy perspective, there is the risk of neglecting the materialist basis of discourse.

The political economy dimension is crucial to any analysis of the British Left and European integration, for three reasons. First, European policies constitute only one part of the wider economic and political programmes of the left. Second, the left rhetorically claims that the socialist project is an internationalist one, dedicated to reforming or overthrowing capitalism as a global system. Third, European policies are by their very nature foreign policies, designed to shape the international economic and political environment, to create maximum room for manoeuvre for the implementation of national programmes.

Therefore, research should attend to the global context of policy-making. Furthermore, European policies need to be viewed within this wider context. However, a purely political economy approach would tend towards abstraction, theory and the elevation of structures over actors. By focusing exclusively on the 'deep' level of the policy process, such an approach would fail to explore the relationship between it and the 'surface' level, that is the link between political economy and the specific policy outputs of particular institutions. Furthermore, it risks neglecting the discursive dimension of policy-making.

Applying the public choice approach would highlight the motivations of policy-makers, thus helping to explain the behaviour and policy-making of left-wing institutions. However, its simplistic assumption of self-interest as the primary factor determining policy formulation negates the possibility of other factors and motivations. Furthermore, such an approach would be normative and difficult to test or falsify.

Applying the power resources approach would ensure the centrality of class and power in policy analysis, two essential components of any conceptual framework. Furthermore, although Korpi applied the concept of power resources to domestic politics, where policies were conceptualised as an outcome of distributive conflict and societal bargaining between capital, labour and the state, there is no reason why the concept could not be applied to foreign policy analysis. However, the power resources approach would provide an important conceptual tool, that of power resources, rather than an integrated conceptual-theoretical framework per se.

It is clear that applying any one of these approaches to this thesis risks reproducing the limitations of the existing research. Furthermore, given the existence of entrenched disciplinary boundaries, attempting to combine these approaches is far from straightforward. However, there is a solution to this impasse that provides a new way forward for policy analysis: the Coxian approach.

3.7 THE COXIAN APPROACH

The work of Cox (1987, 1996, 1997, 2002) provides a comprehensive and integrated conceptual framework rather than a theory per se. The Coxian approach draws upon the work of Gramsci, plus Fernand Braudel, Karl Marx, Karl Polanyi, Georges Sorel, Giambattista Vico, Max Weber, and others. It provides an analytical framework that is relatively open and flexible, in that it is not driven by a rigid theory, yet remains coherent and integrated in the sense that it attends to both actors and structures within the global political economy.

Mittelman (1998) argued that the Coxian approach represents a new paradigm in international relations/international political economy (IR/IPE). However, its potential application is far wider than international studies. With its eclectic approach and ability to transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries, the work of Cox has the capacity to span the whole of the social sciences. Indeed, the Coxian approach has been applied to a range of subjects across the disciplinary spectrum. These include the role of gender and women's movements within international organisations (Stienstra, 1994; Whitworth, 1994; Lee, 1995), the post-war institutionalisation of mass production (Rupert, 1995a), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Rupert, 1995b) and the export of 'low intensity democracy' to the Third World (Robinson, 1996). They also include the internationalisation of the state in Britain (Baker, 1999), the impact of mass communications in Chile (Davies, 1999), the democratisation of southern Africa (Taylor, 1999), social change in Mexico (Morton, 2000), and the agency-structure debate (Bieler and Morton, 2001b). Of relevance to this thesis, the Coxian approach has been applied to the internationalisation and democratisation of southern Europe, particularly Spain, within the global political economy (Holman, 1996), and also to the process of European integration (Bieler, 2000; Bieler and Morton, 2001a).

Coxian historicism possesses four ontological, epistemological and methodological features. The first feature is its commitment to the critical project. The purpose of the social sciences, to paraphrase Marx, is not just to understand the world, but to change it. Consequently, 'theory is always for someone and for some purpose' (Cox, 1995, p.31). With these points in mind, Cox distinguished between problem-solving and critical theory. The former accepts existing power relationships and institutions, attempts to solve the problems that disrupt the operation of the established social system, and encourages the fragmentation of the social sciences. The end result is superficial analysis and a world-view that favours the status quo. Critical theory, on the other hand, questions how the prevailing social system developed. It aims to challenge the dominant power relationships and institutions, identify their origins, assess how and why such relationships and institutions transform over time, and analyse processes of change in a holistic way, incorporating both the parts and the whole. The critical commitment of the Coxian approach gives it two advantages over other approaches: an ethical basis and a propensity to theoretical reflexivity. The former, generally absent in problem-solving theory, is of value in itself to those who wish to change the world, whilst the latter helps to dispel the myth that academic inquiry is objective or value-free.

The second feature is its historicism, where theory is seen as temporally specific and derived from historical experience. In other words, our awareness of social problems and our theories of the social world are historically conditioned. For Cox, Sinclair (1996, p.7) observed, 'social science theories which postulate general or universally valid laws or human regularities are not sustainable, except when the temporal boundaries of these laws are acknowledged.' Instead, the Coxian approach aims to 'reveal the historical structures characteristic of particular eras within which such regularities prevail' (Cox, 1996, p.8).

The third feature is its historical materialist basis, focusing on production, dialectics and the role of the state-society complex. As with other neo-Gramscian approaches, the starting point of the Coxian approach is the social relations of production. For Cox, production should be understood in the broadest sense. 'It is not confined to the production of physical goods used or consumed. It covers the production and reproduction of knowledge and of the social relations, morals and institutions that are prerequisites to the production of physical goods' (Ibid. p.39). Furthermore, conflict and change within the social relations of production, between those who own and control the means of production and those that execute its tasks, become critically important.

The dialectical element of the Coxian approach views historical change as the result of conflict between competing historical structures, such as feudalism and capitalism, and liberalism and fascism. More specifically, the concept of dialectic is understood in two senses: first, the seeking of truth through the exploration of contradictions, and second, analysing the potential for alternative forms of development to arise from the confrontation of rival social forces in any concrete historical situation.

The relationship between the state and civil society, termed the state-society complex, is understood in the Gramscian sense of a reciprocal relationship between base and superstructure. State-society complexes take different historical forms and constitute the basis of world order. The fourth feature is the Coxian method of historical structures.

Historical Structures

Historical structures are formed by collective human action over time, and these, in turn, influence the actions and thoughts of individuals. Historical structures therefore constitute both the framework for social action and reflect a particular configuration of social forces. This configuration does not determine social action in a mechanical sense, but it does constrain and shape it. Social forces can resist the prevailing historical structure and the extent of their influence determines the emergence of an alternative configuration, a rival historical structure.

Historical structures should be understood dialectically, with reference to three categories of forces (material capabilities, ideas and institutions) which interact in historical structures. *Material capabilities* include natural resources and technologies that enable the production and accumulation of wealth, and thus the projection of power.

Ideas include the intersubjective meanings and collective images of social order. The former constitute 'shared notions of the nature of social relations which tend to perpetuate habits and expectations of behaviour.' These notions, 'though durable over long periods of time, are historically conditioned.' The latter include 'different views as to both the nature and the legitimacy of prevailing power relations' (Ibid. pp.98-99).

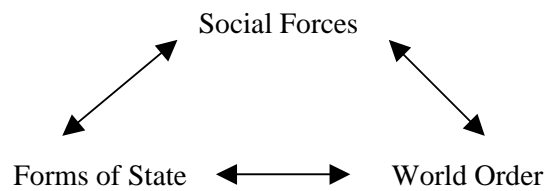
Institutions 'are particular amalgams of ideas and material power which in turn influence the development of ideas and material capabilities' (Ibid. p.99). Institutions, reflecting existing power relations, maintain and reproduce a given social order, and provide a means of neutralising conflict. Cox noted the close correlation between institutionalisation and Gramsci's conception of hegemony:

Institutions provide ways of dealing with conflict so as to minimise the use of force. There is an enforcement potential in the material power relations underlying any structure in that the strong can destroy the weak if they think it necessary. But force will not have to be used in order to ensure the dominance of the strong to the extent that the weak accept the prevailing power relations as legitimate. This the weak may do if the strong see their mission as hegemonic and not merely dominant or dictatorial, that is, if they are willing to make concessions that will secure the weak's acquiescence in their leadership and if they can express this leadership in terms of universal or general interests, rather than just serving their own particular interests (Ibid. p.99).

Cox therefore differentiated between the formation of a hegemonic bloc by the dominant forces, and the attempts to forge a counter-hegemonic bloc by the forces of resistance.

Drawing further upon the work of Gramsci, Cox argued that the degree of congruence between material power, ideas and institutions lends itself to a cyclical theory of history. He suggested that what is needed is a theory that explains why these dimensions fit together in certain times and places, and come apart in others. Cox suggested that, in contemporary terms, social forces, forms of state and world orders represent particular configurations of material capabilities, ideas and institutions (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Coxian Concept of Historical Structures



Source: Reproduced from Cox, 1996, p.101

Crucially, Cox argued that ‘no one-way determinism need to be assumed among these three; the relationships can be assumed to be reciprocal. The question of which way the lines of force run is always a historical question to be answered by a study of the particular case’ (Ibid. p.98). Consequently, exploring the relationship between production and power in the context of post-war historical structures requires an analysis of how the social relations of production give rise to the dominance of certain social forces, that lead to the creation of different forms of states, which, in turn, shape world order. This analysis proceeds by the Coxian method of historical structures.

The Coxian Method of Historical Structures

Cox set out a three-stage method of historical structures. *Stage one* involves identifying the synchronic dimension: analysing the particular configuration of forces in the present historical conjuncture to reveal the relationships that yield the most explanatory power. *Stage two* involves identifying the diachronic dimension: the contradictions and points of conflict within an historical structure that contribute to its transformation. *Stage three* involves the merging of the synchronic and diachronic whereby each historical structure contains both elements of coherence and conflict. Alternative structures may arise and displace the dominant structures, retaining some of their features and transforming others. The method of historical structures therefore necessitates the study of social forces engendered by the production process, the forms of state and world orders, derived from particular state-society complexes. Each of these dimensions can be studied as a succession of dominant and emergent rival structures. Furthermore, they are interrelated because changes in the power relations of production generate new social forces that, in turn, transform states, and this transformation impacts upon the world order.

CONCLUSION

Coxian historicism has the capacity to overcome many deficiencies of contemporary social science. More specifically, it has the potential to answer the recent calls for a ‘new political science’ of British politics. Hay (2003), who advocated greater analytical clarity and openness about analytical assumptions, reflexivity, and theoretical dialogue, set out what he saw as the four key tasks of this new political science. These include the need to evaluate the relationship between agency and structure, the interaction between the discursive and the material, the relative significance of economic, political and cultural factors, and the proportionate impact of domestic, international and transnational factors.

Similarly, Marsh et al. (1999, pp.1-2), arguing that much of post-war British political science research has been ahistorical and atheoretical, called for scholars to incorporate a number of elements into their work. To understand and explain change, they argued, any account

should have a strong historical perspective, being theoretically informed but empirically grounded; needs a sophisticated, rather than simplistic, conception of change; should recognize the importance of political, economic and ideological factors in any explanation of change, rather than exclusively emphasizing one of them; needs to be underpinned by a stated and developed epistemological position; must utilize a dialectical approach to structure and agency, rather than give priority to either; must acknowledge that the relationship between the material and the ideational is crucial and, again, dialectical; and must recognize that any explanation has to take account of the international as well as the domestic context within which change occurs.

The Coxian approach has the capacity to respond to these calls and implement each of these recommendations.

In terms of this thesis, Coxian historicism possesses the capacity to both integrate and transcend the three approaches employed to date. It has attempted to demonstrate how the Coxian approach will enable this thesis to address the five gaps within the existing research. First, it will focus on the wide range of institutions that constitute the British Left. Second, it will focus on the whole 1945-2004 period. Third, it will incorporate a historical materialist analysis. Fourth, it will incorporate the insights of the institutional, discursive, political economy, public choice and power resources approaches by employing an integrated conceptual framework. Fifth, by considering the potential of each of these approaches, it initiates the process of engaging with the wider institutional, discursive, political economy, public choice and power resources literature.

It has also attempted to demonstrate how Coxian historicism will enable this thesis to address some of the key deficiencies of work to date. Its focus on material capabilities will enable the thesis to address the crucial issue of power. Its attention to ideas, more specifically intersubjective meanings and collective images, which can be hegemonic, will incorporate the discursive dimension. Its consideration of institutions, conceptualised in a broad manner, will focus upon both policy processes and policy outcomes. Its emphasis on social forces, deriving from the relations of production, will facilitate the study of class. Its analysis of states and world orders will allow the thesis to analyse the political economy dimension, including the influence of the EU, Soviet Union and the US on British policy-making. Furthermore, the aim of Coxian historicism is to develop an approach that is empirically grounded and historically specific, hence my extensive use of documentary evidence.

The Coxian approach provides a coherent conceptual framework, previously lacking. Coxian historicism, with its commitment to critical theory, dialectical and materialist analysis, historicism and attention to both actors and structures, plus its analysis of power, ideas and institutions, provides a comprehensive, historically specific and empirically grounded conceptual framework within which to study the British Left's response to European integration.