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POWER AND PLURALISM:
A VIEW FROM THE BOTTOM*

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In the absence of its natural defenders, the interest of the excluded is always in danger of being overlooked.

John Stuart Mill

Was he free? Was he happy? The
question is absurd!
Had anything been wrong, we should
certainly have heard.

W. H. Auden

It is said we live in a pluralistic society, and indeed a glance at the social map of America reveals a vast agglomeration of regional, class, occupational, and ethnic associations all busily making claims upon state, local, and national governing agencies. If by pluralism we mean this multiplicity of public and private interests and identities, then America—like any modern society of size and complexity—is pluralistic. Used in this broad sense, the term is not particularly arresting for those political scientists interested in determining the extent to which power is democratically operative in America. However, if by “pluralism” we mean that the opportunities and resources necessary for the exercise of power are *inclusively* rather than exclusively distributed and that neither the enjoyment of dominance nor the suffering of deprivation is the constant condition of any one group, then the question of whether ours is a pluralistic society is not so easily resolved.

The protracted debate between “pluralists” and “anti-pluralists” is testimony to the difficulties we confront. After investigating “concrete decisions” at the community and national levels, the pluralists conclude that participation in decision making is enjoyed

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by a variety of competing groups operating in specific issue-areas often in response to the initiatives of democratically elected officials. No evidence is found to support the claim that a corporate "power elite" rules over an inarticulate mass. If there are elites in our society, they are numerous and specialized, and they are checked in their demands by the institutionalized rules of the political culture and by the competing demands of other elites, all of whom represent varying, if sometimes overlapping, constituencies.¹ Conflict is multilateral and ever-changing, and the "bulk of the population consists not of the mass but of integrated groups and publics, stratified with varying degrees of power,"² and endowed with "a multitude of techniques for exercising influence on decisions salient to them."³

Not long after this theory became the accepted view in American political science, anti-pluralist critics began voicing certain reservations. The anti-pluralists remain unconvinced that influence and benefits are widely distributed, and that political and administrative officers operate as guardians of the unorganized majorities and as the controllers, rather than the servants, of important interests groups.⁴ While not defending the idea of a mono-

¹Robert Dahl's *Who Governs?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961) remains the most intelligent and important pluralist statement, one that can still be read with profit even by those who disagree with it. Other pluralist views may be found in Arnold Rose, *The Power Structure* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); Edward Banfield, *Political Influence* (New York: The Free Press, 1961); David Riesman *et al.*, *The Lonely Crowd* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Co., 1955); Nelson Polsby, *Community Power and Political Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963); David Truman, *The Governmental Process* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953).

²Rose, *Power Structure*, 6.

³Polsby, *Community Power*, 118.

⁴For data and critical analysis supporting the anti-pluralist position see Grant McConnell, *Private Power and American Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966) and the many studies cited therein; see also, Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966); Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1969); Henry Kariel, *The Decline of American Pluralism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961); Theodore Lowi, "The Public Philosophy: Interest-Group Liberalism," *American Political Science Review*, 61 (March 1967), 5-24; Philip Green, "Science, Government and the Case of RAND," *World Politics*, 20 (January 1968), 301-326. For a collection of the best analytic critiques of pluralism, see the articles reprinted in *Apolitical Politics: A Critique of Behavioralism*, ed. by Charles McCoy and John Playford (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1967).

lithic power elite, they question whether elites are mutually restrained by competitive interaction, observing that many of the stronger elites tend to predominate in their particular spheres of activity more or less unmolested by other elites.⁵ Not only are elites often unchecked by public authority on the most important issues affecting them, but in many instances *public* decision-making authority has been parcelled out to *private* interests on a highly inegalitarian basis.⁶ The anti-pluralists further criticize the pluralists for failing to take notice of the “powers of pre-emption”; is it not true, for instance, that corporate leaders often have no need to involve themselves in decision-making efforts because sufficient anticipatory consideration is given to their interests by office-holders?⁷ Attention, therefore, should be directed to the “nondecision,” “non-issue” powers such as the power to predetermine the agenda and limit the scope of issue conflict, and the power to define and propagate “the dominant values . . . myths, rituals and institutions which tend to favor the vested interests of one or more groups relative to others.”⁸

The pluralists respond to these last few criticisms by noting that theories about unuttered anticipatory reactions, invisible participants, and hidden values cannot be scientifically entertained. We may conjure an “infinite regress” of imaginary powers operating

⁵See Peter Bachrach, *The Theory of Democratic Elitism* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), 37. Some anti-pluralists such as G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America?* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967) conclude that a power elite rules at the national level even if there may be more pluralistic elites at the community levels.

⁶See Kariel, *Decline of American Pluralism*, especially chs. 5 and 6 for a development of this point; also Lowi, “Interest-Group Liberalism.”

⁷Even the pluralist Banfield seems to support the above idea. In *Political Influence* he observes (251): “When Mayor Daley took office, he immediately wrote to three or four of the city’s most prominent businessmen asking them to list the things they thought most needed doing. . . . He may be impressed by the intrinsic merit of a proposal . . . but he will be even more impressed at the prospect of being well regarded by the highly respectable people whose proposal it is.”

⁸Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, “Two Faces of Power,” *American Political Science Review*, 56 (December 1962), 950, reprinted in McCoy and Playford, *Apollitical Politics*. For a detailed development of the effects of myth and ritual in political life, see Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Power* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1964); also Thurman Arnold, *The Symbols of Government* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935). For a detailed analysis of the structure and content of a prevalent belief system, see Francis X. Sutton *et al.*, *The American Business Creed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956).

behind the observable decision makers, the pluralists say, but we can study empirically only what is visible, and only those who can be observed making decisions or engaging in activity bearing directly upon decision making can be said to share power.

Now I, for one, have no quarrel with the dictum that we observe only the observable, but it may be suggested that what the pluralists have defined as "observable" is not all that meets the eyes of other researchers. Particularly troublesome to me is the relative absence of lower-strata groups from most community-power studies and the ease with which their absence is either ignored or explained away.

Let me begin with a fundamental pluralist proposition, viz., only those who participate in the decision process share in the exercise of power. If true, then it would follow that those who do *not* participate in decision making do *not* share power. This latter proposition, however, is treated rather equivocally by most pluralists. If the non-participants are of the upper classes, it is concluded that they are non-influential. But if the non-participants are from the lower income groups, it is usually maintained that they exercise "indirect" influence.

The New Haven investigation conducted by Robert Dahl and his former student, Nelson Polsby, represents one of the most important of the pluralists' community studies and, for the moment, I shall concentrate on what is revealed in that work. Dahl and Polsby discover that New Haven's active decision makers consist primarily of civic and political leaders centering around the mayor; only a few of these participants are members of the "economic elite." For one to argue that municipal authorities are under the power of the economic elite one must demonstrate, according to Polsby, that upper-class members "customarily give orders to political and civic leaders" which are obeyed, or that they regularly and successfully block policies, or that they place "their own people in positions of leadership." Finding to his own satisfaction that none of these conditions obtain in New Haven, Polsby concludes that the upper class is not preponderantly influential.⁹

⁹Polsby, *Community Power*, 88-89. Yet Polsby goes on to say, "Mayor Lee's achievement in generating support from New Haven's economic and social elite should not be underestimated Economic and social leaders, who had originally been reluctant to support the urban redevelopment program, became so firmly committed to the program and to Lee that many of

The only way to determine whether actors are powerful, he says, is to observe a sequence of events demonstrating their power: "If these events take place, then the power of the actor is not 'potential' but actual. If these events do not occur, then what grounds have we to suppose that the actor is powerful? There appear to be no scientific grounds for such an assumption." Those who assign "a high power potential to economic dominants" are therefore "indulging in empirically unjustified speculation."¹⁰

What, then, of the lower-strata groups that do not participate in decision making? The New Haven study shows that only a minuscule fraction of the citizenry engage in any activity bearing directly upon community decisions and that none of the decision makers are drawn from lower-income groups, white or black.¹¹ The non-participant, however, exercises "a moderate degree of indirect influence" through his power to elect officials or—if he does not vote—through his "influential contact" with those who do vote, presumably relatives and friends.¹² The vote is an effective popular control because "elected leaders keep the real or imagined preferences of constituents *constantly in mind* in deciding what policies to adopt or reject."¹³ Most people, Dahl observes, "use their political resources scarcely at all," some not even bothering to vote; hence they never fully convert their "potential influence" into "actual influence."¹⁴ They do not exert themselves because they feel no compelling need to participate. To assume that citizens,

these lifelong Republicans found themselves actively supporting Lee for the U. S. Senate and contributing heavily to his re-election campaign against the Republican candidate. At least one businessman even suggested that the *Republican* party nominate Lee for Mayor." (emphasis in the original) it seems not to have occurred to Polsby that Lee's unusual popularity with businessmen was due less to his personal seductiveness than to his having proven himself so repeatedly responsive to business interests. For a more critical study of Mayor Lee's urban renewal program and his dealings with the economic elite, see John Wilhelm, "The Success and Tragedy of Richard Lee," *The New Journal*, 1 (October 15, 1967), 5-9.

¹⁰Polsby, *Community Power*, 60. By this approach, considerations of historical, class, cultural, and structural factors are relegated to an incidental or even non-scientific status. Here indeed is "behaviorism" in its Pavlovian-Watsonian sense.

¹¹Dahl, *Who Governs?*, 180-181. Other community studies similarly find that active participants are almost invariably drawn from professional, business, and better-income strata.

¹²*Ibid.*, 164 and 100-103.

¹³*Ibid.*, 164; the italics are mine.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 270 ff.

especially of the lower class, should be politically active is, Polsby says, to make "the inappropriate and arbitrary assignment of upper and middle-class values to all actors in the community."¹⁵ There are "personally functional" and habitual reasons for lower-class withdrawal having nothing to do with political life. Polsby further assures us that "most of the American communities studied in any detail seem to be relatively healthy political organisms which means that there are bound to be considerable conservatism and self-preservation rather than innovation and demand for change within the system."¹⁶

Here it seems we are confronted with a double standard for the measurement of power. (1) Despite the fact that large corporation leaders and other economic notables control vast resources of wealth and property that affect the livelihoods, living standards, and welfare of the community, it cannot be presumed that they exercise indirect or potential influence over political leaders. Furthermore, it is unscientific to speak of political leaders as having anticipatory reactions to the interests of these economic elites. There must be discernible evidence of upper-class participation and victory in specific policy conflicts. But (2) it may be presumed that the unorganized, less-educated, lower-income voters exercise an indirect influence over decisions to which they have no easy access and about which they often have no direct knowledge. They accomplish this by evoking in the minds of political leaders a set of "constant" but unspecified anticipatory reactions to the voters' policy preferences, preferences that are themselves frequently unspecified and unarticulated.

If it may be postulated, without the benefit of empirical research that ordinary voters exercise indirect controls over decisions, then we can conclude that any community in America that holds elections is, by virtue of that fact, pluralistic. We have thereby presumed to know precisely the things that need to be empirically determined: to whose needs and imperatives do elected officials respond, as measured by which actual decisions and outcomes?

If, however, lower-class groups do not participate in decision-making activities, how can we determine the extent of their in-

¹⁵Polsby, *Community Power*, 116-117; see the critical comments in Jack L. Walker, "A Critique of the Elitist Theory of Democracy," *American Political Science Review*, 60 (June 1966), 289.

¹⁶Polsby, *Community Power*, 134.

fluence, if any, over actual decisions? And what meaning can we ascribe to their non-participation? I would suggest that instead of declaring them to be an unknown but contented entity, we should directly investigate the less privileged elements of a community to determine why they are not active, and what occurs when they attempt to become active. Studies of policy struggles involving lower-strata groups are a rarity in the literature of American political science partly because the poor seldom embark upon such ventures¹⁷ but also because our modes of analysis have defined the scope of our research so as to exclude the less visible activities of the underprivileged. "The case study approach to power location should not be discredited," Todd Gitlin reminds us, "but why are only certain cases studied?"¹⁸

What I shall attempt to do in the following case studies of three "issue-areas" is to observe power "from the bottom up." I shall not attempt any detailed analysis of the maneuvers and interactions within official circles normally considered a central part of the "decision-making process"; rather the focus will be on actors who try to influence decisions from afar, the active non-elites who attempt to overcome the social distance that separates the subject of politics from the object by trying to participate both in the creation of an issue-agenda and in issue-decisions. Any assessment of non-elite influence should take into account actual outcomes: that is to say, to determine whether the protest group does or does not prevail we need to look at the effects of the contested decision. A view from the bottom requires a shift in emphasis away from studying process as an end in itself divorced from substantive effects (who governs?) and toward some empirical con-

¹⁷Actually, political activities involving the dispossessed occur more frequently than we have assumed. In recent years migrant workers, sharecroppers, ghetto blacks, rural whites, American Indians, indigent elderly, and others have made scores of attempts to effect specific changes in various communities and institutions. Most of these activities have yet to be studied systematically as situations that tell us something about the dynamics and distributions of power in America. Most studies of conflict and discontent within the political system are written from the perspective of those concerned with channelizing or reducing the challenges of competing groups; see, for example, Neil J. Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior* (New York: Free Press, 1963). Note the discussion in William Gamson's *Power and Discontent* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1968), 11-19.

¹⁸Todd Gitlin, "Local Pluralism as Theory and Ideology," *Studies on the Left*, 5 (Summer 1965), reprinted in McCoy and Playford, *Apolitical Politics*, 143.

sideration of substantive effects (who gets what?). The presumptions are that substantive effects are, after all, what make the decision process a meaningful and important topic of study, and that they are certainly an essential variable for political actors whose efforts otherwise cannot be properly understood.

Many questions of broad theoretical import might be entertained when investigating the limits and realities of lower-class power and participation. Attention in the present study will be directed primarily to the following theoretical considerations: Is the present political system, as pluralists contend, responsive to the interests of all groups that seek to exercise influence through legitimate channels? And do the protest groups that represent the more acutely deprived strata suffer liabilities within the political system of a kind not usually accounted for in the pluralist theory?

II

Early in the summer of 1964, at the invitation of a private welfare group, 13 members of the Students for a Democratic Society went into the lower Clinton Hill neighborhood in Newark's South Ward and in cooperation with local residents formed the Newark Community Union Project (NCUP), an organization intended to assist ghetto people in the building of a social-protest movement.

The lower Clinton Hill area was turning into an all-black area whose outward appearance of greenery and trees did not quite hide the underlying conditions of overcrowding, poverty, underemployment, and insufficient public services.¹⁹ The already strained housing conditions were further aggravated by the influx of displaced persons whose previous neighborhoods were being obliterated by urban-renewal projects. Nevertheless, as is the case with many large ghettos, the population was somewhat hetero-

¹⁹More than one-half of Newark's 400,000 residents are black. A third of the city's housing is substandard. Unemployment in the ghetto is "officially set at 12 per cent, unofficially as high as 20 per cent"; some 17,000 households try to exist on annual incomes of less than \$3,000. See Paul Goldberg in the *New York Times Magazine*, September 29, 1968, 117. The conditions in Newark are bad but hardly atypical. In municipal governmental structure, political-party system, racial makeup, population density, housing conditions, occupational and income distributions, and the incidence of riot and civil disturbances Newark is fairly representative of most good-sized American cities in the Northeast.

geneous, including in addition to the very poor some relatively comfortable wage-earners, semi-professional and even professional people who remained in the South Ward because of racial discrimination or personal preference.

The NCUP organizers began making contacts with the poorer residents, hoping to find specific issues that would bring people together and involve them in community action.²⁰ The people who came to NCUP meetings, numbering from 25 to 80 on different occasions, and others interviewed in their homes or on street corners almost invariably expressed anger and distress about such problems as job discrimination, job shortages, poor wages, garbage- and snow-removal services, inadequate schools, rent gouging, police brutality, merchant overpricing, etc. "I am mad," said one, "I am angry when I see my people living the way they do." Coupled with these feelings was the widespread conviction that protest efforts would meet with frustration, and that the voices of the poor would not be heard, and if heard, not heeded. "What's the use?" "Nothing can ever get changed." "Why get your hopes up?" were some of the more common remarks. Nevertheless, some 15 residents and seven white students were resolute enough to give almost full-time efforts, staying with NCUP for the duration of its existence, ("This time the poor man's going to do something for himself," said one resident). Another 25 blacks were intensely active for periods extending from several months to half a year, and still scores of others involved themselves intermittently. It may be roughly estimated that as many as 150 residents participated in some major or minor way over a two-and-a-half year period in public demonstrations, rent strikes, meetings, and other organizational activities.²¹

²⁰Many of the events described herein occurred before I began my research. My information is based on protracted interviews and less structured conversations conducted in the autumn of 1965, the winter of 1966, and the spring of 1968 with black activists and whites involved in NCUP, and with other Newark residents. In most instances the information reported here has been corroborated by two or more respondents. A less detailed but helpful history of the events described above has been recorded in the documentary film, "The Troublemakers," produced and distributed by Newsreel, Inc. New York, N.Y. The direct quotations in these case studies are from my interviews and field observations, except for a few taken from the documentary film.

²¹One of the black leaders, Jesse Allen, a former union shop steward, exhausted his life savings in order to support himself while working for NCUP. Other black activists included youths, welfare mothers, housewives, and working and unemployed men.

The problems to which organizers could address themselves were varied and enormous. Several considerations determined priorities: first, what did the people themselves feel most strongly about; second, were there visible targets and goals; third, was there some chance of success? During a period extending from 1964 to 1966 efforts focused primarily on the following issues.

Issue #1 Housing

The poor in the South Ward area paid monthly rents ranging from \$115 to \$135 for the privilege of living without benefit of proper heating and water facilities in small sub-divided apartments in deteriorated, ill-lit, unpainted, rat-infested buildings. Groups of tenants organized by NCUP made several trips to municipal housing authorities to complain of conditions, winning nothing more than promises to "look into things." Subsequent visits to the Human Rights Commission induced that agency to send inspectors to the buildings in question. The inspectors found evidence of widespread building-code violations (as many as 125 in one apartment house), filed reports and sent copies to the landlords in question. Lacking enforcement powers of its own, the Commission took no further actions. After two months had passed without any response from the building owners, NCUP began organizing rent strikes in some of the worst buildings in an eight-block area. This action led several of the landlords, including South Ward City Councilman, Lee Bernstein, to make minor repairs in a few buildings. But most owners did not respond during the first month of the strike and none attempted any major improvements.²² A visit by protestors to the mayor's office in turn produced a visit by Mayor Addonizio to one of the apartment houses; the rent-strike issue had by now won some passing attention in the local press. After taking due note of conditions, the mayor and his team of observers returned to city hall where, in the words of one tenant, "They made us a lot of promises but they didn't carry any out." NCUP protestors, joining forces with a local anti-poverty group, resorted to picketing the suburban

²²In a number of instances it was difficult to determine who owned what building. Some owners found it advantageous to use "fronts." Occasionally a building might change hands several times in quick succession only to return to the hands of the original owner.

home of one of the worst slumlords, an action taken over the protests of Councilman Bernstein who described the peaceful picketing as "disgraceful behavior."

After two months, the landlords whose buildings were affected by the rent strike began issuing eviction notices. One tenant, Mrs. Ida Brown, a mother of five children, was forcibly barred from her apartment by her landlord and two city detectives. When Mrs. Brown protested and attempted to enter her apartment, she was arrested and charged with assault and battery.²³ Her arrest was sufficient to persuade a number of other tenants that they had better withdraw from participation in the rent strike. Still other tenants, with the threat of eviction hanging over them, eventually moved out—their places quickly taken by other poor families—or complied with the law and resumed rent payments. Fear of arrest, forceful eviction, and legal prosecution, combined with a growing realization that nothing was being won except promises from public officials and threats from landlords, eventually proved effective in breaking the momentum of the rent-strike campaign. "There is," a resident accurately concluded, "no way us tenants, no legal way we can fight a landlord."²⁴ The ghetto residents learned what many always had suspected: some laws, such as

²³The detectives charged that Mrs. Brown threw one of them down a flight of stairs. Eyewitnesses gave a contrary account, testifying that it was Mrs. Brown who was thrown down the stairs. The jury chose to believe the police and Mrs. Brown was convicted and given three years probation. A subsequent grand-jury investigation of her countersuit led to the conviction of one of the detectives for assault and battery. The conviction against Mrs. Brown, however, was never repealed.

²⁴This also seems to be the case in other communities. In Mount Vernon, N.Y., in 1965, 15 welfare mothers submitted a petition to housing authorities protesting conditions in their apartment building. Within a week all had been served eviction notices. In New York and other cities, rent strikes when "successful" often produce results of dubious value to the tenants. After laborious legal proceedings on the tenants' parts and after the numerous delaying tactics and appeals available to the landlord have been exhausted, the city usually takes the building into receivership, uses the rent money to make repairs and then returns the building to the landlord while allowing him to charge substantial rent increases because of the improved conditions. Frequently, the repairs are so extensive that the tenants are evicted by the city only to be relocated in slums elsewhere, far from their neighborhood friends, their jobs and their children's schools. Today most community organizers have few illusions about the efficacy of rent strikes. See Stanley Aronowitz, "New York City: After the Rent Strikes," *Studies on the Left*, 5 (Winter 1965), 85-89.

those dealing with the collection of rents, the eviction of tenants, and the protection of property, were swiftly enforceable, while other laws, such as those dealing with flagrant violations of building and safety codes and the protection of people, were unaccountably unenforceable.

The rent strikes ebbed in Newark as in other cities without winning improvements in living conditions, without creating a permanent tenant's movement, and without getting the city and the courts to change their methods of dealing with slumlords. With nothing to show for their months of strenuous organizing, NCUP volunteers turned to a smaller and ostensibly more manageable issue.

Issue #2 A Traffic Light

Given the ghetto's immense needs, the desire for a traffic light on Avon Avenue might have seemed almost frivolous, but neighborhood feelings were surprisingly strong on this issue: too many children had been maimed and killed by speeding vehicles, and people found it hazardous to cross the avenue. For most residents the traffic light was literally a matter of life and death. In a few weeks NCUP collected 350 signatures on a petition, held a block rally, and waged call-in and letter-writing campaigns directed at the mayor and the City Council. Such efforts eventually earned the residents an audience with Mayor Addonizio who, confronted with a strong and well-organized community demand, agreed that a traffic light would be installed forthwith, contingent only upon City Council approval. The residents departed from the meeting in a hopeful spirit. But after another month of inaction NCUP sent another delegation to city hall this time to be told that a traffic light would cost \$24,000 and was therefore too expensive, an argument that even the municipal authorities soon discarded as untenable. The protestors took to blocking traffic and picketing at the Avon Avenue intersection. On several occasions police dispersed the demonstrators with little difficulty, because most participants were hesitant to force a confrontation and expose themselves to arrest. A few "Stop" signs were installed on the side streets leading into Avon Avenue, a gesture that did nothing to slow down the main artery traffic, although it served to forestall further demonstrations as people awaited the impending

light. Municipal officials gave repeated assurances that a traffic light would soon be placed, as one said, "If only you'll just be a little patient." After several more months of inaction and several more visits to city hall, it was revealed that the mayor had no authority to install a traffic light; the matter fell under state jurisdiction and had been referred to Trenton.

The protestors took to the streets again; this time attempts to block traffic led to the arrest of a few demonstrators. Municipal traffic officials continued to send assurances that the permit was "going through." But it remained for the State Bureau of Motor Vehicles to demonstrate how best to thwart the petitioners. State authorities informed NCUP organizers that they could not install a light until they had undertaken an extensive study of traffic conditions at the intersection. Data would be needed to demonstrate that a certain number of accidents—only of a kind that a light could prevent—occurred on Avon Avenue over a given period. Since no one in the community, including police and medical authorities, had kept complete records of vehicle and pedestrian mishaps, there was no proof that a light was needed; only an independent study of forthcoming fatalities and injuries could decide the matter. Despite this professed commitment to empirical research, state traffic authorities seemed unable to indicate when they might initiate the requisite survey. (Soon after this position was enunciated, white residents in a nearby middle-class neighborhood were able to get a traffic light installed 28 days after submitting a petition of approximately fifty signatures.)

Three years later, at the time of this writing, there is still no light, children are still hit by speeding vehicles at the intersection, and state officials have yet to begin their exhaustive study. More than ten months of intensive protest by lower Clinton Hill residents had produced another defeat.

Issue #3 Electoral Contest

"Why didn't you go to the local politicians for help on the rent strike and the traffic light?" I asked a number of the neighborhood organizers. "Are you kidding! They hate us! They call us troublemakers," exclaimed one, "They are whites, Toms, and heavies. They want to run us out of town," said another. "What could they have done?," a white student conjectured in retrospect, "They

knew cooptation in the Democratic Party wouldn't silence us. We couldn't be bought off. So they were out to defeat us—even on a little thing like a traffic light." The Democratic party regulars were viewed as either indifferent or unsympathetic to ghetto needs. On the few occasions when they showed themselves responsive to the poor, it was in the performance of petty favors. They might "look into" a complaint by a mother that her welfare checks were not arriving, but they would not challenge some of the more demeaning and punitive features of the welfare system nor the conditions that fostered it. They might find a municipal job for a faithful precinct worker, but they would not advance proposals leading to a fundamental attack on ghetto unemployment. They might procure an apartment for a family but they would not ask the landlord, who himself was often a party contributor, to making housing improvements, nor would they think of challenging his right to charge exorbitant rents. The party regulars, whether white or Negro, seemed prepared to "look into" everything except certain of the more harrowing realities of slum life.

An opportunity to challenge them seemed to present itself in the autumn of 1965 when the United Freedom Ticket (UFT), a coalition of dissident blacks, Puerto Ricans, and "civil-rights oriented whites," asked NCUP to support the insurgency candidacy of George Richardson, a black man and a former Democratic assemblyman who had broken with the party because of its unwillingness to confront the problems of slum housing and police brutality. Richardson was "sort of a politician" to some NCUP people, and "no great prize in his political views," but he compared most favorably to his Democratic opponent whom one UFT supporter described as "the ultimate Uncle Tom." After some debate, NCUP decided to support the United Freedom Ticket which, in addition to Richardson, was running two other black candidates for State Assembly offices. After the failure of the rent-strike and traffic-light campaigns, a frontal assault at the polls seemed the only recourse: "We are tired of protesting and losing, so we're going right into politics," explained one organizer who hoped that NCUP's coalition with the UFT would increase the efficacy of both groups. Even if the Democratic incumbents were not defeated, a serious electoral challenge might make them somewhat more responsive to reformist pressure.

It was anticipated by some of the NCUP people that the campaign would provide an opportunity for creating a community-wide dialogue on fundamental issues. "Organizing the people" was, first of all, a matter of devising means of reaching and talking to persons who had never been reached before; the campaign seemed to offer just such an occasion. But faced with the necessity of swiftly reaching large numbers of people, and equipped with only limited resources, the challengers soon found themselves resorting to the traditional techniques of sound truck, leaflets, and slogans. Even so, not more than one-third of the contested area was covered and less than one-third of the voters were actually approached by UFT volunteers.

"We've got that one thing that can take it away from [the bosses]" Candidate Richardson said, "the vote." Not many residents believed him. Campaigning for "decent housing," "more and better jobs," and "freedom," the UFT found itself burdened by the very sins it was trying to fight: too many years of unfulfilled pledges by too many candidates had left people immune to political promises. Some residents felt threatened by appeals for direct involvement: "I don't know anything about politics. I don't want to have anything to do with it," was a typical response. Many had never heard of the UFT and were hesitant about an unknown ingredient. Still others indicated their sympathy for the third party's goals but were quick to voice their skepticism: "We've had our people in there before and they couldn't do nothing." The many expressions of cynicism and distrust reported by UFT canvassers might be summarized as follows: (1) Reformers were politicians, and therefore were as deceptive and insincere as other politicians. (2) Even if sincere, reformers were eventually "bought off" by those in control. (3) Even if not "bought off," reformers remained helpless against the entrenched powers: what could the UFT do even if it won all three contested seats? The conviction that "politics" could not deliver anything significant left many of the poor unresponsive, even if not unsympathetic, toward those who promised meaningful changes through the ballot box.

Of the blacks who voted, the greater number were the "better-to-do" elements—ministers, funeral directors, small businessmen, postal and clerical workers, and some skilled workers. A sizable number were beholden to, or related to those beholden to, the Democratic organization for jobs or for positions within the party

that brought a modicum of social prestige. Often both resented and respected by poorer residents, the local ward politicians cultivated a wide range of acquaintances and traded on "friends and neighbors" appeals. They repeatedly stressed that a vote for the UFT might bring a Republican victory, and while many voters entertained no great expectations about the Democrats, they did fear that the Republicans might in some nameless way create still greater difficulties for blacks.²⁵ For some middle- and lower-middle-class blacks the act of voting was valued as a manifestation of civic virtue comparable to saluting the flag or singing the national anthem, a mark of good citizenship status reflecting well upon those Negroes who achieved it.²⁶

Both the Democratic and Republican organizations provided substantial funds for neighborhood workers who saturated the black and white precincts with posters, party literature, and door-to-door canvassing, and who manned the fleet of cars to transport voters to and from the polls on election day. Even with these efforts, less than half of the registered blacks bothered to vote (as against almost two-thirds of the whites in the contested areas). The UFT ticket was thoroughly defeated, running well behind both major parties and polling less than five percent of the vote.

This description of events in Newark cannot be concluded without some mention of the role played by community officials. In statements to the press and sometimes to the protestors themselves, municipal officials voiced a dedication to the best interests of the people. It would have been remarkable had they professed anything else, but their behavior sometimes did betray their words. The methods they utilized to defeat NCUP on the rent-strike and traffic-light issues were familiar ones—the insistence that the problem in question needed elaborate investigation, the claim that the issue was not within a given authority's jurisdiction, the posing of rigorous and time-consuming legalistic procedures, the ritualistic appearance of a public official to investigate the question—followed by disingenuous promises that a solution was at hand, and the constant admonition that the protestors should exer-

²⁵The South Ward might be considered as having a "modified two-party system": the Republicans are always strong enough to raise a serious electoral challenge but seldom strong enough to win.

²⁶Compare with Howard Swearer's explanation of electoral participation in the Soviet Union in his "The Functions of Soviet Local Elections," *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, 5 (May 1961), 149.

cise restraint and patience. "They just moved to go through the motions, to make us think they were moving," said one black man. "The city," concluded a white youth, "did a masterful job of destroying us. After awhile we didn't know who was the target. . . . we were always promised something to take the steam out [of us] They just wore us down with a run-around."²⁷

The protestors also were subjected to a series of unsavory harassments. A replica of the *NCUP Newsletter*, printed by unknown individuals and containing what purported to be admissions of perverted sexual practices and communist affiliations falsely attributed to NCUP volunteers, was mailed to some 500 *NCUP Newsletter* subscribers. NCUP was infiltrated by at least one undercover agent who was ejected from the organization after admitting to being in the pay of an unnamed municipal personage. It was apparently through his efforts that the newsletter subscription list was obtained. A black detective, who quit the police force out of disgust for the racism he had encountered, confirmed the strong suspicions of NCUP workers that their telephone was being tapped by the police. On one occasion three NCUP girls were evicted from their three-bedroom apartment on charges of maintaining an unsanitary premise, sleeping on the floors, and conducting sex orgies. The landlord's letter containing these accusations was reprinted by a City Councilman and circulated among members of the Council and other municipal authorities. NCUP itself was evicted from its original storefront office, without being given a reason for the action. On another occasion threatening calls on the telephone by unidentified voices were followed by the breaking of NCUP office windows. Police repeatedly entered the office and arrested NCUP workers on disorderly conduct or loitering charges. A municipal judge once instructed one organizer brought before him to "go back to Russia." Other workers were arrested without cause while lawfully picketing a local food store accused of overpricing. Within a period of a few days, six black teenagers who assisted in routine NCUP tasks and who were planning a youth organization were arrested coming to and from the NCUP office. When Jesse Allen, a mild-mannered black leader of NCUP, went to the fifth precinct station to inquire on

²⁷Those who insist that more militant protest tactics should not be employed until all legitimate legislative and administrative channels for redressing grievances have been exhausted, might consider whether such channels are not, by their very nature, inexhaustible.

their behalf, he, too, was placed under arrest. Two of the youths who were arrested were convicted of breaking probation, and each was made to serve two years in prison.

The only conceivably friendly gesture directed toward NCUP in the several years of its existence came in the late spring of 1967 when Mayor Addonizio and Police Chief Spina sent letters asking the organizers to help "keep a cool summer" in the ghetto. The ensuing summer riots sent a number of NCUP people into hiding because, as two of them testify, a highly placed state official gave warning that police would be "out to get the radicals." These precautions did not prevent several NCUP workers from being arrested soon after the disorders and charged with conspiracy to riot and arson, charges that were subsequently dropped for lack of evidence.

By the end of 1967 NCUP ceased functioning. Several of the whites moved on to SDS organizing or to community action programs in other cities; others got jobs in Newark. Some of the activist blacks became involved in running a community center set up by the Union Community Corporation, an anti-poverty group under OEO sponsorship. They now found their energies absorbed in minor administrative tasks and were no longer involved in protest action. NCUP dissolved without ever coming close to achieving its central objective: the building of a viable local social movement that could exercise influence and win changes in community conditions and in the system that fostered those conditions.

In his study of young radicals, Kenneth Keniston made an observation that might serve as a summary description of the white and black activists in Newark: "What is most impressive is not their secret motivation to have the System fail, but their naive hope that it would succeed, and the extent of their depression and disillusion when their early reformist hopes were frustrated."²⁸ Some of the people who were engaged in NCUP have long since discarded their earlier hopes about the viability of the system, thereby recalling to mind an observation made by Christian Bay in 1965: "If budding western-democracy-type pluralist institutions turn out to benefit only the middle and upper classes—as in many Latin American countries—then we should not be surprised

²⁸Kenneth Keniston, *Young Radicals, Notes on Committed Youth* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), 127.

if idealistic students and others with a passion for social justice. . . become disposed to reject the forms of pluralist democracy altogether."²⁹

III

The events in Newark provide us with a view of community power that qualifies the pluralist picture in several important respects. The following discussion attempts to summarize the findings and analyze some of the wider implications of this study.

1) For the urban blacks of Newark who had the temerity to fight city hall there exists the world of the rulers and the world of the ruled, and whether or not the first world is composed of a monolithic elite or of intramurally competing groups does not alter the fact that the blacks find themselves inhabiting the second. What impresses them and what might impress us is that the visible agents of the ruling world, a "plurality of actors and interests"—as represented by the municipal and state housing officials, motor vehicle and transit authorities, the landlords and reality investors, the mayor, the City Council, the political machines, the courts, and the police—displayed a remarkable capacity to move in the same direction against some rather modest lower-class claims.

It is one thing to conclude that power is not the monopoly of any one cohesive power elite and another to contend that it is broadly distributed among countervailing and democratically responsive groups. The belief that lower-strata groups exercise a constant, albeit indirect, power remains an article of faith rather than a demonstrated proposition at least with regard to the issues investigated in this study. Banfield's assertion that community decision makers operate "on the principle that everyone should get something and no one should be hurt very much," and Dahl's view that "all active and legitimate groups in the population can make themselves heard at some crucial stage in the process of decision," do not seem to be borne out.³⁰ Nor were we able to de-

²⁹Christian Bay, "Politics are Pseudopolitics: A Critical Evaluation of Some Behavioral Literature," *The American Political Science Review*, 59 (March 1965), 39-51; reprinted in McCoy and Playford, *Apolitical Politics*.

³⁰Banfield, *Political Influence*, 272; Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 137, but see the qualification Dahl offers on 138. Another pluralist, Merelman, goes so far as to argue that those who are defeated nevertheless share in power because they

tect the "multitude of techniques for exercising influence on decisions" that Polsby believes are readily available to any group willing to engage in political competition.³¹

It may be that decision makers are responsive to lower-class pressures that are less visible than those observed in this study, but, as the pluralists would warn us, we should not embark upon an infinite regress of conjectures about covert influences. If Newark's officials were favorably influenced by the ghetto poor it must have been in ways so subtle as to have escaped the attention of both the researcher and the poor themselves. Since the data indicate that a lower-class group exercises no successful influence when *active*, I find no compelling reason to entertain the conclusion that the group wields power through unspecified means when *inactive*.

The data on Newark are consistent with the suggestion, offered by Edelman and Lipsky, that students of power and protest make a distinction between symbolic reassurances and substantive goods; the former are almost always more readily allocated to protesters and are usually designed for the purpose of deflecting the protest.³² The few "positive" responses made by Newark's officials cost little in time, energy, and support; they were the appropriate "reciprocal noises," to use Dahl's term, intended primarily as substitutes for more tangible allocations. The familiar delaying tactics used by public officials are, Lipsky observes, "particularly effective in dealing with protest groups because of [the group's] inherent instability."³³ And the group's instability is, he adds, due to its dependence on the political resources of "third parties." This

have been able to induce the prevailing group to expend the effort needed to vanquish them! "Even if those planning to initiate policies hostile to an 'elite' become subject to its power and are constrained to desist, they still have exerted power of their own. The elite has been forced to anticipate them and exert power in return." Richard Merelman, "On the Neo-Elitist Critique of Community Power," *The American Political Science Review*, 62 (June 1968), 455. It is impossible using Merelman's model to imagine any situation, even a suppressive one, as not being somewhat pluralistic: both conqueror and conquered, victimizer and victim, share in power. In contrast, the model offered by Dahl and Polsby defines power as the ability to prevail in a given issue conflict.

³¹Polsby, *Community Power*, 118.

³²See Edelman, *Symbolic Uses of Power*, 2 and *passim*; and Michael Lipsky, "Protest as a Political Resource," *American Political Science Review*, 62, (December 1968), 1148 and 1155.

³³Lipsky, "Protest," 1156-1157.

study of Newark shows, however, that even when a group demonstrates unusual durability—the NCUP persisted for three years—it still may be unable to outlast the decision makers. The latter can, so to speak, wait forever, and on many issues they would prefer to do so, while the protest group, *no matter how organizationally stable*, must start producing results if it is ever to attract a stronger following.

The idea that nothing succeeds like success is well understood by the challenged authorities. Often their unwillingness to make tangible allocations is due less to any consideration of immediate political expenditure than to their concern that present protests are but a prelude to more challenging and more costly demands. The traffic light (unlike the housing issue) hardly represented an appropriation that would have strained municipal resources or threatened the interests of more powerful groups, but a victory for the protestors might have strengthened precisely the kind of oppositional activity that Newark's officials wanted to discourage.

2) One of the most important aspects of power is the ability not only to prevail in a struggle but to predetermine the agenda of struggle, that is, to determine whether certain questions ever reach the competition stage. Assertions about the impossibility of empirically studying these “nondecisions” need to be reexamined. Many “nondecisions” are really decisions of a sort, specifically to avoid or prevent the emergence of a particular course of action.³⁴ Much of the behavior of Newark's officials can be seen as a kind of “politics of prevention,” to use Harold Lasswell's term, a series of decisions designed to limit the area of issue conflict. More extensive study of the attitudes, actions, and inactions of municipal authorities toward lower-strata claims might reveal a startling number of instances in which office-holders avoid politically difficult responses to lower-class pressures. “The problem of politics,” according to Lasswell, “is less to solve conflicts than to prevent them.” Too much inclusiveness of “all the interests con-

³⁴Here I am not referring to that category of nondecisions that Bachrach and Baratz see contained in the norms and beliefs of the socio-political culture and that are less frequently or less obviously the objects of deliberate manipulation. But even such “unconscious,” “implicit” belief systems are not inaccessible to analysis. See Sutton *et al.*, *American Business Creed* and Edelman, *Symbolic Uses of Power*. Few political scientists have begun to think of belief systems as resources of power comparable to the other resources commonly identified in decision conflicts.

cerned arouses a psychology of conflict which produces obstructive, fictitious and irrelevant values," a situation best avoided when social administrators and political leaders learn to dampen by skillful tactics those issues that they judge to be detrimental to the public interest.³⁵ Newark offers an example of how "the politics of prevention" is practiced in the less than antiseptic world of a municipality.

Direct observation of lower-class groups may bring to light other instances of "nondecisions" and "non-issues," specifically those resulting from the actual and anticipated discouragements suffered by people at the lower level of the social structure. In classic democratic theory and in much of the pluralist literature attention has been focused primarily on the presumed capacity of political leaders to anticipate the interests of various constituencies, but perhaps a more significant determinant of the conflict agenda can be found in the anticipatory reactions of lower-strata groups toward those who govern. In Newark, for instance, no attempt was made to organize protest around a number of real grievances. "If we couldn't even get a lousy traffic light with half the neighborhood out there screaming for it," explained one NCUP worker, "how could we hope to fight the corporations and the unions. . . or even the school system?" Protest groups remain inactive in certain areas because, given the enormity of the conditions needing change and the strength of the interests opposing change, they see no opportunity for effective protest.³⁶ For them the agenda is predetermined by preferences and powers other than their own.

The same might be said of isolated individuals. Only a small percentage of the lower Clinton Hill residents were active in the various NCUP projects. According to one view, most sternly enunciated by Polsby, there is no reason to assume that politically quiescent people suffer deprivations unless they express actual grievances. But this ostensibly empirically-minded position

³⁵Harold Lasswell, *Psychopathology and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), 196-197; also the critical comments in Kariel, *Decline of American Pluralism*, 117 ff., and Bachrach, *Democratic Elitism*, 66-67.

³⁶Compare with E. E. Schattschneider's remark: "People are not likely to start a fight if they are certain that they are going to be severely penalized for their efforts. In this situation repression may assume the guise of a false unanimity." *The Semi-Sovereign People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), 8.

harbors an a priori assumption, for, in fact, individuals may remain politically quiescent (1) because they feel no deprivation or (2) because they feel real and urgent deprivations but are convinced that protest is futile and, hence, give no political expression to their grievances. One can decide which is the case only by empirical investigation of the social group in question.³⁷ Any widely felt deprivation discovered by the investigator that fails to become an issue because the deprived don't have the ability to force a confrontation may be considered a "non-issue"; these "non-issues" (or anticipatory reactions) are *empirically visible* even if, by their nature, they tend to be *politically invisible*.

The unwillingness of so many people in Newark to make any kind of political commitment can be partly attributed to the limitations on the time and energy of the poor.³⁸ Working long hours for low pay, deprived of a host of services that middle-class whites take for granted, many residents have neither the physical nor psychic energy to engage in the demanding tasks of community organizing. Many do not feel personally capable and confident enough to ask their neighbors or themselves to participate actively. In a way that most white people cannot appreciate, fear is a palpable ingredient in the lives of the black poor; many are deterred by fear of eviction, legal harassment, prosecution, police assault, and by a more diffuse and ubiquitous fear of the powers that be.

If I were to offer any one explanation for non-participation it would be the profound and widespread belief of so many ghetto residents that there exists no means of taking effective action against long-standing grievances, and that investments of scarce

³⁷Painstaking field work may no longer be necessary if one simply wishes to establish the fact that lower-class grievances exist. Expressions of ills have become so explosive and riotous as to have won even the glaze-eyed attention of the mass media. In the summer of 1967 there were 75 major outbreaks of disorder and in the spring of 1968 over 100 cities suffered some kind of riot and disorder.

³⁸Non-participation can also be ascribed in part to conditions that are hardly exclusive to the poor. Thus it may not be clearly within the interest of individual members of large groups to make the kinds of personal expenditures needed to win goals beneficial to the entire group unless there are more particularized rewards or coercions that act as personal incentives. To some extent this is a problem confronting all collective action. See Mancur Olsen, Jr., *The Logic of Collective Action* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965). One might still observe that economically deprived groups are unusually wanting in the resources that allow for particularized incentives and hence they suffer unusually severe difficulties of organization and leadership.

time, energy, money, and, perhaps most of all, hope serve for nought except to aggravate one's sense of affliction and impotence. In this case, non-participation is an expression of what Kenneth Clark describes as "the psychology of the ghetto with its pervasive and total sense of helplessness,"³⁹ a pattern of anticipatory reactions that attempt to avoid direct exposure to, and competition against, unresponsive and unsympathetic authorities.

The contention that the poor are not really discontent else they would register a protest vote at election time presupposes among other things that the poor share or should share the middle-class belief that the ballot is an effective and meaningful means of changing the condition of their lives and their community. But, recalling Polsby's warning, we must guard against "the inappropriate and arbitrary assignment of upper and middle-class values to all actors in the community." We might also avoid treating lower-class non-participation as a self-generated entity, a manifestation of some innate subcultural habit or lack of civic virtue, and allow ourselves the notion that attitudes of defeatism and withdrawal are fostered by conditions within the socio-economic system and to that extent are accurate representations of the systemic realities and everyday-life conditions faced by the black poor.⁴⁰

With that in mind, we might question the consistency and ease with which public-opinion surveys report that lower-strata individuals are more apathetic and less informed than citizens from better educated upper-income groups. If by "apathy" we mean the absence of affect and awareness, then many ghetto blacks, while non-participants in the usual political activities, can hardly be described as "apathetic." Apathy should not be confused with

³⁹Kenneth Clark, *Dark Ghetto* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 156.

⁴⁰Contrary to an accepted notion, the great majority of the poor families of Newark, New York, New Haven, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Watts—to mention a few of the places that have been studied—are stable, self-respecting, and hard-working, headed by fathers, or in the absence of a male, by working mothers who care deeply and labor hard for their children, but they face substandard housing, inhumane hospitals and schools, poor work conditions, low pay, high rents, overpriced stores, etc. They find themselves trapped not by "a matriarchal slave-family cultural heritage" but by the socio-economic system. See Studs Terkel, *Division Street: America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967); Paul Jacobs, *Prelude to Riot* (New York: Random House, 1966); Charles Willie's "Two Men and their Families," in *Among the People*, ed. by Irwin Deutscher and Elizabeth Thomson (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 53-66; and Clark, *Dark Ghetto*.

antipathy and alienation.⁴¹ As to the finding that lower-class people are "less informed," what impressed me most about the poor, often semi-literate, blacks I talked to (residents of Newark and also of New York and more recently New Haven) was the extent to which they had a rather precise notion of what afflicted them and certainly a better sense of the difficulties and deprivations that beset the black community than the whites have in the same cities, many of whom refused to accept the legitimacy of black complaints.⁴²

Whether a group appears apathetic and ill-informed depends on the kinds of questions it is being asked. Perhaps survey research, not unlike I.Q. testing, inadvertently reflects the cultural and class biases of the dominant society by focusing on those questions that are defined by the white middle-class world as "public issues." Something of the same criticism can be made of community power research of the last 15 years. That researchers have been able to study so many American cities and find so few deep-seated grievances tells us more about their research models than about urban reality. By confining themselves to issues pursued by politically visible interests they have rarely reached the muted lower strata.⁴³ "Rigid adherence to a conceptual

⁴¹Many of the black poor of Newark fit Robert Lane's description of the "alienation syndrome": "I am the object, not the subject of political life. . . . The government is not run in my interest; they do not care about me; in this sense it is not my government. . . ." *Political Ideology* (New York: Free Press, 1962), 162.

⁴²A similar conclusion is drawn by Terkel, *Division Street*, after extensive interviews with whites and blacks in Chicago. See also the findings on black attitudes concerning the 1964 riots and the comparison to white responses in J. R. Feagin and P. B. Sheatsley, "Ghetto Resident Appraisals of a Riot," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 32 (Fall 1968), 352-362; and the "Kerner Report" on the 1967 riots: *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), ch. 5 and *passim*.

⁴³Thus neither Dahl nor Polsby have much to say about the reactions of slum dwellers displaced by the New Haven urban renewal program. Polsby observes: "Who wanted urban redevelopment? By 1957, practically everyone who had anything to say in public strongly favored this program." *Community Power*, 71. Dahl makes a passing reference to those who did not have "anything to say in public": "several hundred slum dwellers without much political influence" and a handful of small businessmen. Nothing more is heard about those who suffered from urban redevelopment. *Who Governs?*, 244. (See comments by Gitlin, "Local Pluralism," 141-142.) Polsby (*Community Power*, 96-97) further assures us that in regard to goals that are "in some way explicitly pursued by people in the community, the method of study in New Haven has a reasonable chance of capturing them." Whether that claim is

schema," Charles McCoy notes in his critical appraisal of pluralism, "restricts the range of the political scientist's observable data so that he may fail to see what is taking place outside his frame of reference."⁴⁴

3) If "inequalities in political resources remain, they tend to be *noncumulative*," some pluralists believe, since no one group either monopolizes or is totally deprived of the attributes of power.⁴⁵ Even if lacking in money and leadership, the lower strata still have the power of numbers. Thus it may be argued that the failure of NCUP and the UFT to mobilize sufficient numbers of poor people tells us only that they were unable to tap the ghetto's power resources and not that such resources are non-existent.

The contention that the slum constituency is ineffective because it fails to mobilize its numerical strength is something of a tautology. It is to say that the poor will have power if and when they act in such a way as to have power—presumably in sufficient numbers with sufficient energy. But the only way we can determine "sufficiency" is by noting that the poor prevail on a given issue. By that approach, they can never be judged powerless. If they win on any issue, then they have power; if they lose, they still have power but sufficient numbers have not made sufficient use of it. One cannot imagine a situation in which sufficient numbers have acted and lost; the proposition is established by definition rather than by observation and is non-falsifiable.

Moreover, to contend that the lower strata have a potential power that would prevail should they *choose* to use it presumes that their non-participation is purely a matter of volition. The volition argument is given its more familiar and vulgar expression by

true or not, his method of study will tell us nothing about those goals desired by large segments of the population but not "explicitly pursued," or goals that, if pursued, fail to achieve political visibility because of the organizational weakness of the deprived group or the unresponsiveness of community leaders. Similarly, Harold Lasswell's contention that "it is impossible to locate the few without considering the many" is highly questionable. Lasswell's own work repeatedly demonstrates that a student of power can focus on the activities of the few without finding it imperative to consider the well-being of the many. See his *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1936), 309 and comments by Bachrach, *Democratic Elitism*, 66.

⁴⁴McCoy in the introduction to McCoy and Playford, *Apolitical Politics*, 5.

⁴⁵Dahl, *Who Governs?*, 85; italics in the original.

those who dismiss the inequalities of opportunity in economic life: "Anyone can make his fortune if he puts his mind and effort to it." The antecedent conditions that are crucial determinants of performance merely become a matter of self-willed doggedness.⁴⁶ The argument overlooks the fact that the ability to take effective advantage of an opportunity, the ability to convert potentiality into actuality, is itself a crucial power. The actualization of any potential power requires the use of antecedent resources, and just as one needs capital to make capital, so one needs power to use power. This is especially true of the power of numbers insofar as the opportunity to achieve political effectiveness by activating large numbers of people, especially lower-class citizens, within the normal channels of group politics, necessitates a substantial command of time, manpower, publicity, organization, legitimacy, knowledgeableness, and—the ingredient that often can determine the availability of these resources—money. Aside from its more circumspect influences, money is needed for the acquisition of elected office. "Probably the most important direct contribution" to political leaders, according to Dahl himself, "is money." The "most important indirect contribution is votes . . ."⁴⁷ The power of numbers, then, is an influence that is highly qualified by material and class considerations.

For the poor of Newark, the situation closely approximates one of "cumulative inequalities," to use Dahl's term. If the poor possessed the material resources needed to mobilize themselves, they would not be poor and would have less need to organize their numbers in a struggle to win services that the economic and political systems readily grant to more favored groups. Can the dispossessed who desire inclusion in the decision process gain access to political office without the capital needed to mobilize and activate their numbers? There seems no easy answer to this question. The problem of "political capital accumulation" is compounded by

⁴⁶In fairness to Dahl it should be said that his view of "potential power" is not as simple as that held by other students. In *Who Governs?*, 275, he notes that there are important "objective differences" among constituents that limit their potential power: ". . . being poor or rich, well-educated or uneducated, a professional man or an unskilled laborer, living in a slum area or a middle-class neighborhood—these are differences in objective situations of a most persistent and general sort that are likely to show up in a variety of different ways over a long period of time." It is our loss that Dahl did not see fit to develop these observations.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 97.

the fact that, unlike the indigent in many other countries, the poor in America are a minority and therefore even when mobilized for electoral participation may have only a limited impact. The power of numbers can be employed with countervailing efficacy by the majority that identifies itself with the "haves" and against the "have nots."

Furthermore, in places like Newark, the one institution theoretically designed to mobilize and respond to the demands of the unorganized lower strata—the local political party—fails to do so. One of the hallowed teachings of American political science is that the political party is the citizens' means of exercising collective power; the stronger the party system, the more ably will it affect the polyarchic will. But the party organization in Newark is less a vehicle for democratic dialogue and polyarchic power than a pressure group with a rather narrowly defined interest in the pursuit of office, favor, and patronage. Moved to collective activity only at election time, local politicians seem most possessed with the overriding task of securing and advancing their own positions and maintaining the ongoing equilibrium.

Party politicians are inclined to respond positively not to group *needs* but to group *demands*, and in political life as in economic life, *needs* do not become *marketable demands* until they are backed by "buying power" or "exchange power" for only then is it in the "producer's" interest to respond. The problem with most lower-strata groups is that they have few political resources of their own to exchange.⁴⁸ NCUP's protest action failed to create the kinds of inducements that would have made it in the political leaders' interest to take positive measures. The withholding of rent payments, the street-corner demonstrations, the momentary disruptions of traffic and the feeble electoral challenge were treated by the politicians of Newark not as bargaining resources but as minor nuisances that were not to be allowed to develop into major threats. Concessions to the troublemakers might have led to demands for even greater reallocations and eventually would have challenged the interests of groups endowed with far more political "buying power."

4) Not only do party regulars have little inclination to enter-

⁴⁸See the analysis in James Q. Wilson, "The Strategy of Protest: Problems of Negro Civic Action," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 3 (September 1961), 291-303; and Lipsky, "Protest," 1145-1146.

tain the kinds of issues that might incur the wrath of higher political leaders or powerful economic interests, but they also try to discredit and defeat those reformers who seek confrontations on such issues.⁴⁹ Questions about poverty, urban squalor, unemployment, the tax structure, and the ownership, control, and uses of private and public wealth do not win the attention of most urban political organizations. But the sins of the politician are more than personal ones, for the forces that limit him also circumscribe most of political life. The very agenda of legitimate conflict is shaped by widely accepted and unquestioned belief systems and power distributions that predispose the decision maker to view the claims of certain groups as "reasonable" or "essential" and the claims of other groups as "questionable" or "outrageous." The systemic norms and rules governing political procedures operate with something less than egalitarian effects. To say that the political system is governed by "the rules of the game" is to apply an unfortunate metaphor. In most games the rules apply equally to all competitors, but in political life the symbolic norms, standards, and practices that govern traditional forms of political competition are themselves part of the object of competition. Rules that regulate procedures and priorities in any social system cannot be extricated from the substantive values and interests that led to their construction. Rather than being neutral judgments, they are the embodiment of past political victories and, as such, favor those who have "written" them. Many of the past struggles of dispossessed groups have involved actions that, until legalized as part of the rules, were treated as crimes against property and against the Constitution; these actions have included collective bargaining,

⁴⁹Newark is not the only city in which the party regulars manifest either indifference or antipathy toward the issues raised by reformers. Describing Negro politicians in Chicago, Banfield notes: "Like all politicians, they had to consider their political futures. Only one or two were 'race men.' The others had accommodated themselves to a situation in which whites held the upper hand." The man who dominated Negro political life for so many years, Congressman Dawson, is described as one who does small favors for constituents, "takes care" of his precinct workers, and remains "indifferent to issues and principles including those of special importance to the race." Banfield, *Political Influence*, 41, 260. A year as participant-observer in New Haven politics (1967-68) leads me to the same conclusions about the Negro ward leaders in that city; they say and do nothing that might earn the disapproval of Democratic Town Committee Chairman Barbieri, raise no issues of racial or economic content, and oppose those white reformers and black activists who do—as on the issue of the black boycott in the spring of 1968.

boycotts, strikes, sit-downs, and the demand to legislate standards for wages, hours, and other working conditions. Many of the earlier efforts in the labor movement were directed toward legalizing certain methods of protest and competition, thereby changing the rules so as to allow for more effective participation in future competitions.⁵¹ Those who contend that a commitment to the rules is a precondition for democratic politics⁵² overlook the fact that for some groups such a commitment is tantamount to accepting a condition of permanent defeat since certain of the rules as presently constituted (e.g., the rent laws) are, in fact, the weapons of a dominant interest.

We can conclude that the existence of protest activity should not be treated as a sure manifestation of a pluralistic influence system. Even if the thought is incongruent with the pluralist model, it should come as no surprise to political scientists that the practices of the political system do not guarantee that all groups will have accessibility to the loci of decision making, and that the ability to be heard in a debate, even when achieved, is not tantamount to the sharing of power. If American communities are governed democratically, then let it be said that democracy, like any other form of government, is a power system that allocates its values and priorities most favorably to those who have the most power, to those who have the wherewithal to take best advantage of systemic arrangements. The political order that emerges may prove to be "functional" and "workable" without contributing to the well-being of large segments of the population. Those who are most needful of substantive reallocations are, by that very fact, usually farthest removed from the resources necessary to command such reallocations and least able to make effective use of whatever limited resources they possess.

⁵⁰Truman, *Governmental Process*, 513.

⁵¹See Michael Walzer, "Civil Disobedience and Corporate Authority," forthcoming in a book of readings edited by Philip Green and Sanford Levinson.

⁵²Thus Truman notes that the rules of the game are part of "the substance of prevailing values without which the political system could not exist." *Governmental Process*, 348; and James D. Barber writes: "To a large degree, a successful democracy depends on agreement as to how the system is to be used, on the rules of the game." *Citizens Politics* (Chicago: Markham Publishing Company, 1969), 93-94.