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Ideas, Institutions and the Policies of Governments: a Comparative Analysis: Part III

ANTHONY KING*

III THE PATTERN EXPLAINED

In part I of this paper we described the gross pattern of public policy in our five countries. In part II we looked at how the pattern developed in each of the countries. We noticed that the countries have pursued policies that diverge widely, at least with respect to the size of the direct operating role of the State in the provision of public services. We also noticed that the United States differs from the four other countries far more than they do from each other. These findings will not have come as a great surprise to anybody, although some readers may have been surprised – in view of the common assumption that all major western countries are ‘welfare states’ – to discover just how much the countries differ and what different histories they have had.

In any event, it is time now to turn directly to the problem of explanation. Obviously any explanation, were it to account for all of the phenomena we have referred to, would have to be exceedingly elaborate. It would have to encompass a large number of particular events within the five countries as well as the variations amongst them. All we will attempt here is a general explanation of why the United States is so strikingly different. We shall assume that the explanation we need is indeed general: in other words, that the pattern we have observed is not simply the chance outcome of a series of more or less random occurrences. We shall also assume that it is the American pattern, in particular, that needs to be accounted for.

Much of the most important work in the field of public policy in recent years has, of course, been concerned with a very similar problem: accounting for the variations in the expenditure policies of the American states.¹ The writers on this subject have singled out two types of (mainly quantifiable) variable:

* Department of Government, University of Essex. This article, by the Editor of the *Journal*, was accepted for publication by his predecessor, Brian Barry. Parts I and II appeared in the previous number.

¹ See esp. Thomas R. Dye, *Politics, Economics and the Public: Policy Outcomes in the American States* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966), and Ira Sharkansky, *Spending in the American States* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968). Examples of similar cross-national research include Frederic L. Pryor, *Public Expenditures in Communist and Capitalist Nations* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1968); Henry Aaron, ‘Social Security: International Comparisons’ in Otto Eckstein, ed., *Studies in the Economics of Income Maintenance* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1967), 13–48; Phillips Cutright, ‘Political Structure, Economic Development, and National Social Security Programs’, *American Journal of Sociology*, Lxx (1965), 537–50; Felix Paukert,

'political' (e.g. extent of party competition, relationship between governor and legislature, apportionment of legislative districts), and 'socio-economic' (e.g. *per capita* income, degree of urbanization, degree of industrialization). They have then gone on, using correlation techniques, to relate these variables to one another and to the variations in policy to be explained. Unfortunately this approach is denied us here, given the problem we have set ourselves. Quite apart from the fact that we are dealing with five units instead of fifty, there is no reason to suppose that any of the expenditures-in-the-states variables is significantly related to any of the differences between the United States and the other four countries. All five are, or have been during much of their recent history, rich, urban, industrial and politically competitive; to the extent that there have been variations in, for example, their constitutions, these variations have not had any discernible bearing on their policies. It is, in effect, as though we were trying to account for the differences, not amongst all fifty states, but only amongst (say) New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania.

We must therefore look elsewhere. We shall consider explanations in terms of five possible variables: elites, demands, interest groups, institutions, and ideas.² These variables obviously interact with one another, or at least they could. Some examples of such interaction will be noted below, but for simplicity's sake the five variables will mostly be treated separately. As with the other parts of the paper, the discussion will be very brief, with only the main lines of the argument roughed out.

Elites

It could be maintained, first, that government plays a smaller role in the US because *the US, unlike the other four countries, is dominated by an elite which wishes to inhibit the expansion of State activity and succeeds in doing so*. For this proposition to be true, at least one of the following propositions would also have to be true: either America is dominated by an elite whereas the other four countries are not; or the American elite is alone in wishing to limit the sphere of the State; or the American elite is not alone in wishing to limit the sphere of the State but is alone in actually succeeding in doing so. It would also have to be the case that there were in the US factors making for the expansion of State activity, which would have their effect but for the elite's intervention.

Much in this line of argument is not very plausible. America may or may not

'Social Security and Income Redistribution: A Comparative Study', *International Labour Review*, xcvi, (1968), 425-50; and Koji Taira and Peter Kilby, 'Differences in Social Security Development in Selected Countries', *International Social Security Review*, xxii (1969), 139-53. See also Alexander J. Groth, *Comparative Politics: A Distributive Approach* (New York: Macmillan, 1971).

² It could be claimed that the differences in our five countries' policies should be explained in terms of the countries' different 'needs'. Quite apart from the fact that an explanation in terms of needs would be almost impossible to operationalize, such an explanation, if someone produced one, would almost certainly turn out to be false. It is hard to conceive of any sense in which it would be accurate to say that Germany 'needed' health insurance in the 1880s whereas the United States did not need it until the 1960s, or that France 'needed' a publicly-owned railway system in the 1930s whereas the US still does not need one in the 1970s.

be dominated by an elite, but, if it is, then so are Canada, Britain, France and West Germany; there is hardly an industrial country anywhere whose power structure has not been interpreted in the style of C. Wright Mills.³ There is similarly no reason to suppose – on the assumption that all five countries are dominated by elites – that the American elite is somehow more successful than the others in imposing its will, or in thwarting the wills of others; indeed it would be paradoxical to say of an elite that it was an elite but yet could not get its way in matters that were important to it. Nevertheless, there is one element in the elitist explanation – the possibility that the American elite, if it exists, is alone in wishing to limit the sphere of the State – which cannot be dismissed out of hand. We shall come back to it at the end.

Demands

A second possible explanation of the relatively limited role played by government in the US is that, *whereas the mass publics in the other countries have demanded expansions of State activity, the American mass public has not*. In other words, irrespective of whether the United States is dominated by an elite, it may be that little has happened because little has been called for. An alternative rendering of this hypothesis would be that, whereas in any or all of the other countries governments do things whether or not they are demanded, in the US governments act only on demand and, since little has been demanded, little has been done; in other words, public opinion may play a more important part in American political life than elsewhere.⁴

These possibilities raise all sorts of questions, as yet unanswered, in the empirical theory of representation. They also pose a very real problem of evidence: who is to say what the Canadian people wanted in 1917 or the French in the 1920s? All the same, there are a number of points which can be made with some confidence, and, while they should not lead anyone to reject the demands hypothesis outright, they make one wonder whether it can provide more than a very small part of the general explanation we are looking for.

It is hard to think of any act of nationalization in Canada or Europe that took place as the result of widespread public demand for it. The British case is probably typical. Many historians believe that, if anything, Labour won the 1945 general election despite its commitments to nationalization not because of them, and that most voters remained pretty indifferent to the Labour Government's subse-

³ C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956). For a more recent treatment see G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America?* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967). For a discussion of Western countries generally, though with special emphasis on Britain, see Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969); Miliband's footnotes are a good guide to the Marxist and Millsian literature.

⁴ We are assuming here that mass demands are in some sense 'given': that politicians and governments do not create demands, only react to them. But of course there is every reason to think that public demands and expectations are as much a consequence as a cause of governmental activity: that politicians frequently respond to demands that they themselves have created; see Murray Edelman, *Politics as Symbolic Action: Mass Arousal and Quiescence* (Chicago: Markham, 1971). This point does not contradict, but rather reinforces, the argument developed below.

quent nationalization measures.⁵ Butler and Stokes found in the 1960s that, of a panel of electors interviewed twice at an interval of approximately sixteen months, 61 per cent either had no opinion at all on nationalization or no stable opinion; of the minority with definite opinions, the great majority wanted either no more nationalization or even the denationalization of industries already in the public sector.⁶ Yet in 1967 the Wilson Government nationalized the great bulk of the British iron and steel industry.

The only exception to this pattern of indifference/hostility is probably France in 1944–6, where the overwhelming need for national reconstruction and the anti-patriotic aura that private business had acquired during the Occupation seem to have created a climate of public opinion favourable to State ownership. It has been claimed by a French historian that in 1944 ‘the great majority of Frenchmen were convinced of the economic, social and political superiority of nationalised industry over private industry.’⁷

The picture is quite different in connection with the social services. Much of the evidence is lacking but, as far as one can make out, popular majorities at most times in all of our five countries have desired – often greatly desired – the extension of existing social services and the establishment of new ones. Even Bismarck and Lloyd George, although they could not be sure whether a demand for social-welfare measures already existed, believed that one soon would exist and that it would be politically expedient to anticipate it. More important for our purposes, the American mass public seems to differ hardly at all in this connection from the mass publics of other countries. The evidence on this point is, for once, abundant.⁸ To take only one example, Free and Cantril report two surveys, taken in 1964 and 1967, which asked samples of the US electorate for their views about government spending in a variety of social-service fields. A summary of the results is set out in Table 1. Free and Cantril also found in 1964 that 62 per cent favoured federal aid to education and 63 per cent a hospital insurance scheme for the aged.⁹ These findings are not untypical.¹⁰ They suggest rather strongly that the State’s

⁵ See, e.g., R. B. McCallum and Alison Readman, *The British General Election of 1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), *passim*, and T. O. Lloyd, *Empire to Welfare State: English History 1906–1967* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), Chap. 10. But cf. Hadley Cantril, ed., *Public Opinion 1935–1946* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1951), pp. 272, 343, 476, 677–8, 696 and 728.

⁶ David Butler and Donald Stokes, *Political Change in Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 177–8.

⁷ René Gendarme, quoted in Warren C. Baum, *The French Economy and the State* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958), p. 174.

⁸ Abundant but scattered. It is an interesting comment on the research interests of political scientists that no one since Cantril (see fn. 5) has bothered to compile cross-nationally the results of surveys of public attitudes towards domestic policies.

⁹ Lloyd A. Free and Hadley Cantril, *The Political Beliefs of Americans* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1967), p. 13.

¹⁰ See e.g. the Survey Research Center (Michigan) data reported at various points in V. O. Key, Jr., *Public Opinion and American Democracy* (New York: Knopf, 1961). A fascinating compilation, so far largely overlooked by political scientists, is Michael E. Schiltz, *Public Attitudes Toward Social Security 1935–1965* (Washington, D.C.: US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1970).

TABLE I *American Attitudes towards Social Services, 1964, 1967*

	Present level of spending, or increase %	Reduced level of spending, or none %
Low-rent public housing ('64)	63	22
Urban renewal ('64)	67	21
Community Action ('67)	54	35
Job retraining ('67)	75	21
Head Start ('67)	67	26

Source: Free and Cantril, *Political Beliefs of Americans*, pp. 11-14.

comparatively limited provision of social services in the US is not readily attributable to differences in public opinion. They also suggest that, at least in this field, public opinion does not in fact play a larger role in the US than elsewhere – possibly even the reverse.¹¹

The explanation in terms of a dominant elite and the explanation in terms of demands are not perhaps very convincing, even on the face of it. Certainly, although much has been written about both elites and demands, neither has often been used for the purpose of explaining variations in policy. The next three lines of argument are, however, frequently advanced, sometimes by different writers, sometimes in combination by the same writer.¹²

Interest groups

The first of these holds that government plays a more limited role in America because, *whereas in other countries interest groups have not prevented the role of government from expanding, in the US they have*. This argument looks straightforward enough, but it could in fact mean one or more of at least three quite different things. It could mean that interest groups are in possession of more politically usable resources in the United States than in other countries; or it could mean that, although interest groups in most countries are almost equally well endowed with resources, interest groups in America, unlike those elsewhere, have used their resources to keep the State within relatively narrow confines; or it could mean that, although American interest groups have no more resources than other interest groups and do not use their resources for different purposes from other interest groups, they do have the good fortune to work within a framework of institutions that affords them the maximum opportunity to use their resources successfully.

The first of these propositions – that interest groups have more resources in the US than elsewhere – would probably at one time have been widely accepted

¹¹ See also the comments in Theodore R. Marmor, *The Politics of Medicare* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 115.

¹² For an example of different factors being used to explain the same phenomenon, without the writers' apparently realizing that the factors are different, see Roy Lubove, *The Struggle for Social Security 1900-1935* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. vii (Foreword by Oscar Handlin), 5-6, 66, 123.

as true; but the work of Beer and others has made it clear that the conditions under which interest groups can be expected to be strong are to be found in most industrial democracies.¹³ The interest groups of Britain, West Germany and Canada have the same sorts of resources at their disposal as those of the United States: leadership skills, knowledge, numbers, access to the media of communication, in some cases, ultimately, the sanction of withdrawing their co-operation. In Britain at least, the major interests are less fragmented organizationally than their American counterparts and succeed in organizing a larger proportion of their potential memberships.¹⁴ In Britain and West Germany, groups benefit from being regarded as having a legitimate right to participate actively in governmental decision making.¹⁵ Only in France do interest groups appear to have considerable difficulty in mobilizing themselves effectively.¹⁶ Since, France apart, American interest groups are not stronger, in this sense, than interest groups in other countries, it follows that the strength of the American groups cannot be used to explain the idiosyncratic pattern of American policy.

The second of the three propositions mentioned above – that interest groups in the United States are more concerned than those in other countries with keeping the State within narrow confines – is worth saying something about, even though there is no comparative literature on the aims of interest groups – indeed precisely for that reason.

Up till now, academic research on interest groups has tended to take groups' perceptions of their own interests as given: a group's beliefs about its interests *are* its interests.¹⁷ On this interpretation, questions about where a group's true interests lie arise only when they are actually raised within the group, by contending factions or by dissident minorities. Even then, the observer usually merely notes the existence of the differences of opinion and does not adjudicate among them; he does not 'second guess' the group's leadership or take sides in its quarrels.

This approach may be the only one that can be adopted most of the time; but the attempt to comprehend the behaviour of comparable interest groups across national frontiers exposes a latent weakness in it. Suppose that two interest groups, one in one country, one in another, seem, as regards their material interests, to be in very similar situations: both are faced with a piece of new legislation that may reasonably be expected to affect (say) their incomes or hours

¹³ See Samuel H. Beer, 'Pressure Groups and Parties in Britain', *American Political Science Review*, L (1956), 1–23.

¹⁴ Compare S. E. Finer, *Anonymous Empire: A Study of the Lobby in Great Britain*, 2nd edn. (London: Pall Mall, 1966), Chap. 2, with, e.g., Harmon Zeigler, *Interest Groups in American Society* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964).

¹⁵ See e.g. Samuel H. Beer, *British Politics in the Collectivist Age* (New York: Knopf, 1965), esp. pp. 329–30; Robert J. Lieber, *British Politics and European Unity: Parties, Elites, and Pressure Groups* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970); Gerard Braunthal, *The Federation of German Industry in Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1965); and William Safran, *Veto-Group Politics: The Case of Health-Insurance Reform in West Germany* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1967).

¹⁶ For a brief, recent summary of the French position see Pierre Avril, *Politics in France* (Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin Books), pp. 242–50.

¹⁷ See e.g. David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process* (New York: Knopf, 1951), pp. 33–4.

of work. Suppose further, however, that the group in one country generally accepts the legislation and tries only to modify it in detail, while the group in the other rejects it out of hand and expends enormous resources campaigning against it. One possible explanation for the groups' discrepant behaviour may be that they possess different information or are making different predictions about the future. Another may be that they find themselves in different tactical situations such that, if either were in the other's position, it would behave similarly. But another possible explanation is that the two groups perceive their interests differently. And they may perceive their interests differently because they have absorbed the values, beliefs and expectations characteristic of the different polities within which they operate. This is too large a theme to be pursued here, but anyone comparing the rhetoric of American interest groups with that of groups in other countries is bound to be struck by what seems to be the American groups' much greater disposition to state their positions in abstract terms and, in particular, to raise, continually, large questions about the role of the State.¹⁸ This tendency probably tells us something about the considerations that American groups have in mind in determining where their interests lie. It undoubtedly tells us a great deal also about the sorts of considerations which the groups believe will appeal to the American mass public and to American decision makers.

The third of the three propositions relating to interest groups suggests that, whatever their resources and their aims, American groups have the great good fortune to work within a framework of institutions that affords them the maximum opportunities for using their resources effectively, especially when what they want to do is prevent things from happening. Since this proposition has more to do with the institutions than with the interest groups themselves, we will consider it in the next section.

Institutions

The classic explanation of the limited role played by the State in the United States as compared with other countries is one having to do with the structure and functioning of American institutions. The contention here is that *the American political system has a number of unusual institutional features, which have the effect of maximizing the probability that any given proposal for a change in policy will be rejected or deferred*. These features include: federalism, the separation of powers between executive and legislature, the constitutional position of the Supreme Court, the part played by committees in Congress, the seniority system in Congress, the malapportionment (until quite recently) of congressional districts, and the absence of disciplined political parties.¹⁹

¹⁸ Note e.g. the contrast between the American and British experiences with health insurance cited in Part II of this paper: *British Journal of Political Science*, III (1973), pp. 308–9. See also Max J. Skidmore, *Medicare and the American Rhetoric of Reconciliation* (University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1970).

¹⁹ A recent statement of the classic view – or at least of part of it – is James MacGregor Burns, *The Deadlock of Democracy: Four-Party Politics in America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963); see esp. Part III and Chap. 4. See also Duane Lockard, *The Perverted Priorities of American Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1971).

To do full justice to this explanation would require a paper much longer than this one. It would also require a great deal of imagination, since this explanation, in an even more demanding way than the others, forces us to try to conceive of what the gross pattern of public policy in the United States would be like were American institutions radically other than they are: it is rather like trying to imagine which of two grand masters would win a tournament if they played not chess or even checkers but croquet. This explanation also differs completely from the others discussed so far in that, whereas in the case of elites, demands and interest groups we were arguing that the US does not differ in most material respects from the other four countries, in this case there can be no doubt that political realities as well as constitutional forms in the US are quite unlike those in Canada and western Europe.²⁰

The question, then, is not whether America's institutions differ from the other countries' but whether these differences can account for the observed differences in their patterns of policy. There would seem to be three reasons for supposing that they cannot – at least not on their own.

First, as we have already seen, it has never seriously been suggested in the US that certain tasks undertaken by governments in Canada and Europe – for instance, the operation of railways and airlines – should also be undertaken by government in America. Suggestions of this kind have occasionally been made but almost never by major national leaders or parties. And this fact seems hard to attribute to institutional resistances. Of course politicians often refrain from putting forward proposals because they know they have no chance of success; possible courses of action may not even cross their minds for the same reason. But it is very hard to believe that American political leaders have consistently, over a period of nearly a hundred years, failed to advance proposals which they might otherwise have advanced simply or even mainly because they feared defeat as the result of obstruction in the House Rules Committee or an adverse ruling by the Supreme Court. It seems much more probable that politicians in the US have not advanced such proposals either because they did not believe in them themselves, or because they believed that other politicians did not believe in them, i.e. that they could not obtain adequate majorities in the various governmental arenas.

Second, in comparative perspective, even reformist Congresses and Administrations, like those of Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson, appear as remarkable for what they have not done as for what they have. Only small excursions have been made into the field of public enterprise; and, among the social services, Medicare is only the most conspicuous instance of State provision having been introduced in the United States on a relatively limited basis although substantially more developed programmes had already been in existence, sometimes for many years, in other countries. This apparent reluctance on the part

²⁰ Of course the differences may not be so great as they appear on the surface: the absence of a strong system of legislative committees does not necessarily mean the absence of opportunities for delay and obstruction; the presence of disciplined parties does not necessarily mean that leaders can lead their followers anywhere.

of even reformist majorities to expand the role of the State very far cannot be accounted for in institutional terms.

Third, the institutional obstacles, although they undoubtedly exist, can be surmounted. One of the striking things about the American experience is that almost all of the major innovations in the policy fields we have been discussing have been concentrated in a small number of Congresses: Roosevelt's first three, and the 89th elected with Johnson in 1964. And what distinguished these Congresses was not the absence of procedural obstacles (although minor procedural changes were made) but the presence of determined reformist majorities. In 1935 the Social Security Act passed both houses of Congress in under six months; in 1965 Medicare, having been debated in one form or another for nearly twenty years, was enacted in under seven months. The Social Security Act passed the House of Representatives by 371 votes to 33, Medicare by 315 votes to 115.²¹ When the will to surmount them is there, the institutional obstacles do not seem so formidable after all.

These points need to be qualified. For one thing, although the obstacles usually referred to – federalism, the separation of powers, and so forth – are not insuperable, it may be that other institutional factors – for example, the structure of American political parties or the expensiveness of political campaigns – result in the election of Congresses and Administrations (especially the former) that are less willing than the electorate to envisage the State's playing an expanded role. For instance, as late as 1961 the congressional liaison staff of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare reckoned that Medicare still could not command a simple majority in the House of Representatives even though the evidence suggested that public opinion had supported Medicare or something like it for many years.²² For another, it would be wrong wholly to discount the role played by the Supreme Court prior to 1937. Although not entirely consistent in its judgements, the Court repeatedly struck down legislation that offended against the canons of *laissez-faire*: in 1905, a New York statute regulating working hours in bakeshops; in 1908, a federal law prohibiting 'yellow dog' labour contracts (in which workers bound themselves not to join trade unions); in 1918 and 1922, two federal Child Labor Acts; in 1923, a District of Columbia minimum wage law; and so on.²³ The belief that the Court would strike down other similar pieces of legislation undoubtedly prevented many of them from being considered in the first place.

These qualifications are important. Nevertheless, it seems pretty clear that, for the three reasons given, the institutional explanation by itself is not enough. To the extent that institutional factors operate, they must, it seems, operate in conjunction with others.

²¹ Lubove, *Struggle for Social Security*, Chaps. 6–7; Marmor, *Politics of Medicare*, p. 72.

²² Marmor, *Politics of Medicare*, Chap. 3.

²³ The best summary account of the Supreme Court's attitude towards social legislation in the pre-1937 period is probably Alfred H. Kelly and Winifred A. Harbison, *The American Constitution: Its Origin and Development*, 3rd edn. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), Chaps. 19–27.

Ideas

The time has come to let the cat out of the bag – especially since most readers will have noticed that it has already been squirming for a long time. If the argument so far is correct, it follows that the most satisfactory single solution to our problem is also the simplest: *the State plays a more limited role in America than elsewhere because Americans, more than other people, want it to play a limited role.* In other words, the most satisfactory explanation is one in terms of Americans' beliefs and assumptions, especially their beliefs and assumptions about government.

There is no need to go into detail here about what these beliefs and assumptions are. They can be summarized in a series of catch phrases: free enterprise is more efficient than government; governments should concentrate on encouraging private initiative and free competition; government is wasteful; governments should not provide people with things they can provide for themselves; too much government endangers liberty; and so on.²⁴

Obviously many Americans' political beliefs are much more elaborate and subtle than such phrases imply. Obviously, too, not all Americans believe all of these things. The central point is that almost every American takes it for granted that the State has very few – and should have very few – direct operating responsibilities: that the State should opt 'for the role of referee rather than that of manager.'²⁵ If a proposal is made in the United States that the State should not merely supervise the doing of something by somebody else but should actually do it itself, the onus is on the proposer to demonstrate that the case in favour of State action is simply overwhelming. It has to be overwhelming since Americans, unlike Europeans, are not accustomed to a high level of governmental activity and since it will simply be assumed, probably even by the proposer himself, that the *a priori* objections to State action are exceedingly powerful. It is against this background that organizations like the AMA practically always bring forward highly general anti-State arguments against the most specific proposals entailing an expansion of the government's role.

One example, quoted by Shonfield, will give an idea of how pervasive these ideas are.²⁶ In the early 1960s, during the Kennedy Administration, the Bureau

²⁴ On various aspects of American political beliefs see Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955); Francis X. Sutton *et al.*, *The American Business Creed* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956); Yehoshua Arieli, *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966); Grant McConnell, *Private Power and American Democracy* (New York: Knopf, 1966); Robert E. Lane, *Political Ideology* (New York: Free Press, 1962), esp. Part I; Andrew Shonfield, *Modern Capitalism: The Changing Balance of Public and Private Power* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); and Skidmore, *Medicare*, Chap. 1. For studies which emphasize divisions within the United States see e.g. James P. Young, *The Politics of Affluence: Ideology in the United States since World War II* (Scranton, Pa.: Chandler, 1968) and Kenneth M. Dolbeare and Patricia Dolbeare, *American Ideologies: The Competing Political Beliefs of the 1970s* (Chicago: Markham, 1971). Unfortunately none of these books, with the partial exception of Hartz, seeks to compare and contrast American beliefs and attitudes with those of other countries.

²⁵ Shonfield, *Modern Capitalism*, p. 330.

²⁶ The rest of this paragraph, save for the last sentence, is a paraphrase of Shonfield, *Modern Capitalism*, p. 330.

of the Budget directive to all federal agencies on the use of government-owned production facilities was introduced with a preamble that began: 'Because the private enterprise system is basic to the American economy . . .' It went on to warn any civil servant who proposed to use public enterprise for the 'provision of a product or service' that 'the burden of proof lies on the agency which determines that an exception to the general policy is required'. Nor was the civil servant to imagine, if he came across a piece of public enterprise which was already in operation, that he had no duty to put matters right: 'The existence of government-owned capital assets is not in itself an adequate justification for the government to produce its own goods or services. The need for continued government ownership or operation must be fully substantiated.' Finally, he might be tempted to believe that his obligations had been met once private enterprise had been brought in to take charge of and operate the publicly-owned undertaking. Not so: 'Even the operation of a government-owned facility by a private organization through the contractual arrangement does not automatically ensure that the government is not competing with private enterprise. This type of arrangement could act as a barrier to the development and growth of competitive commercial sources and procurement through ordinary business channels.' In the United States, in short, the machinery of government is not an accepted piece of institutional apparatus to be made use of as and when required; it is a sort of emergency appliance, to be wheeled out only in the most extreme circumstances and put back in its place, if possible, as soon as the emergency is over.

The contrast between the United States and our other four countries is not complete: most Canadians probably make the same sorts of assumptions as Americans about the role of the State, and the Conservative Party in Britain has a strong bias in favour of the private sector. But the contrast is very great nonetheless. Certainly it is more than great enough to account for the policy divergences we have observed. Not only are social democrats in Canada and Europe committed to making extensive use of the machinery of the State: equally important, conservatives in the other four countries, as we have seen, are also not consistently anti-Statist in attitude; on the contrary, they often express a highly exalted view of the role of the State in economic and social life. It was not a socialist but a British Conservative MP who said: 'In many respects . . . the individual is as much derived from the State as the State is from the individual.'²⁷ It was not a socialist but de Gaulle who said: 'It is to the State that it falls to build the nation's power, which, henceforth, depends on the economy.'²⁸

Before we move on to some final observations and our conclusion, one further question remains to be considered, concerning the chief exception to the American policy pattern: the case of education. Far from government in the United States playing a limited role in this field, it plays a considerably larger role than in any of the other four countries. Why should this be so?

²⁷ Lord Hugh Cecil quoted in R. J. Black, ed., *The Conservative Tradition* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1950), p. 84.

²⁸ Quoted as the epigraph to *Public Enterprise in France*, an undated document published by the French Embassy in London.

The answer seems to be that education is an issue that lies athwart the predominantly anti-Statist tendency of American thinking. American cultural values contain a latent dilemma. On the one hand, they place great emphasis – much greater than do European values – on equality and on the provision of opportunities for upward social mobility. On the other, they lay equally great emphasis on the sustaining of a highly individualistic social order. The question has been how to provide a degree of equality of opportunity within the existing order. Education has been the answer. Education seems to reconcile equality with individualism. Largely for this reason, in America it became, as Welter has pointed out, a substitute for other forms of social action.²⁹ More to the point, the State could be permitted to be the major supplier of education because, on economic grounds, it was clear that, if the State did not supply education, no one else would. Thus, education was a field – almost the only field – in which the State could expand without competing, except in a very small way, with private institutions. The State's position was also buttressed by the desire of native Americans to 'Americanize' succeeding waves of immigrants. This was not a task that could safely be left to private institutions, since private institutions in practice would have meant (and sometimes did mean) the immigrant communities themselves.³⁰

FINAL OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSION

At the very beginning of this paper we remarked that its aim was to start trains of thought, not stop them. Since then we have surveyed a vast terrain. Inevitably some matters have been slighted, others not touched on at all. Even if one is disposed to accept the paper's general line of argument, there are a number of areas that still deserve to be explored.

One has to do with the public service and attitudes towards it. In a paper dealing with some of the same questions as this one, Heidenheimer notes that in the United States, especially during the Progressive era, 'mistrust of the probity and

²⁹ Rush Welter, *Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 189, 241.

³⁰ On relevant aspects of the history and purposes of American education see R. Freeman Butts, *A History of Education in American Culture* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1953), esp. Chaps. 9–12; Robert J. Havighurst and Bernice L. Neugarten, *Society and Education*, 2nd edn. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1962), esp. Chaps. 2, 9; Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University* (New York: Knopf, 1962), esp. Chap. 22; Laurence R. Vesey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), *passim*; and Milton Schwebel, *Who Can be Educated?* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), esp. Part I. Unfortunately, as in the case of the books on American political ideas (see fn. 24), almost none of these books compares American educational ideas with those of other countries. Schwebel, however, does have some things to say about educational equality in Britain, France, Germany and the Soviet Union; see *Who Can be Educated?*, Chap. 2. In the light of our emphasis on the central role of ideas about the State, it is interesting to note that the United States is the only country where the idea is taken seriously of providing citizens with educational vouchers which they could then 'spend' on education as they chose; State and non-State institutions would thereby be put on an equal footing. On the voucher proposal see Milton Friedman, 'The Role of Government in Education' in Robert A. Solo, ed., *Economics and the Public Interest* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1955).

efficiency of public officialdom greatly strengthened the position of those who were opposed to public sector expansion on ideological and private-interest grounds.' 'More than that,' he adds, 'it deterred reformers from even proposing to endow public jurisdictions with more than regulatory powers.'³¹ Clearly this is a contention that cannot be dismissed out of hand; it suggests that, at the least, another variable – perceived quality of the public service – should be considered along with the others we have discussed. What is not clear is how far the late development of the American public service was a cause of the non-expansion of the American State, and how far it was a consequence. It is plausible to argue that the American State was kept within narrow confines because of the poor quality of its servants. It seems equally plausible to argue that, because such a limited view was taken of the State's role, incentives to improve the quality of the public service were lacking. There is probably some truth in both contentions.

Another area worth exploring is implicit in the phrase we have used several times: 'direct operating role of the State'. The emphasis in this paper has been on the things that governments do on their own, not through intermediaries or by means of regulation – in other words, on the State as manager rather than referee. But of course some of the most important things that governments do (by any criteria) fall outside this rubric. Governments not only run things: they also, as we observed earlier, regulate things, license things and subsidize things. All governments pursue such economic objectives as growth, full employment, price stability and balance-of-payments equilibrium. Comparative research would almost certainly reveal as wide variations in these matters as we have observed in connection with public ownership and the social services. These variations, too, would be worth trying to account for.

If there is variation in policy, there is also variation, as again we have observed, in men's beliefs and attitudes about the role of government and about what the specific objects of government should be. Shonfield's *Modern Capitalism* is largely concerned with such variation as it affects economic policy. Unfortunately this is not a matter that has been gone into systematically, either with regard to individual countries (though there is some work on the United States) or comparatively.³² This paper, like Hartz's book, has emphasized the anti-Statist, Lockean thrust of most American thought. Closer examination, however, would probably suggest that American Lockeanism was in some sense deformed: that it had for better or worse become largely a pro-business creed. If ideas are as important as this paper has suggested, it follows that if we are to understand public policy we must know much more about the ideas of those who make policy.

This point leads directly to another. We talked in Part 3 of the beliefs and assumptions of 'Americans', and it probably is true that the level of consensus about the desirability of government's playing a limited role is high in the US.

³¹ Arnold J. Heidenheimer, 'The Politics of Public Education, Health and Welfare in the USA and Western Europe: How Growth and Reform Potentials Have Differed', *British Journal of Political Science*, III (1973), pp. 325–6.

³² On the United States see fn. 24 above.

But how high? And is this belief in the limited role of government consistent with other things that Americans also believe? If not, do Americans value the limited role of government more or less highly than other things they value? Are preferences and preference-orderings about these matters distributed randomly through the American population, or is the distribution skewed in some way?

The literature relevant to these questions is suggestive. It suggests that, while the belief in limited government is widespread, it is by no means universal; that the belief in limited government is not consistent with other things that Americans believe; and that, where the belief in limited government comes into conflict with other things Americans believe, the other beliefs are often likely to be preferred.

The simple point that Americans are by no means unanimous in their hostility towards 'big government' emerges from a number of studies, including the one by Free and Cantril cited earlier (p. 412). Free and Cantril's findings also indicate that, to the extent that Americans are hostile towards big government, their hostility is in many cases not consistent with their views on more concrete questions, especially those connected with income maintenance and social welfare. Free and Cantril asked their sample in 1964, for example, whether or not they agreed with the following statement: 'Social problems here in this country could be solved more effectively if the government would only keep its hands off and let people in local communities handle their own problems in their own ways.' Nearly half of the sample, 49 per cent, said they did agree, but despite the wording of the statement, fully 38 per cent said they did not. And, since this was the same sample which produced substantial majorities in favour of new government programmes in the fields of education and health insurance, at least some respondents must have given replies which, on the face of it, seem inconsistent. The Free and Cantril data do not by themselves show that, forced to choose between their preference for hands-off government and their preference for (say) Medicare, the respondents would have chosen Medicare; but, on the basis of other survey findings, there is every reason to suppose that they would.³³

Evidence of this sort raises in one's mind the possibility that the role of the State in America is limited, not because all Americans believe it should be and are prepared to act on that belief, but because those who make policy in America – ultimately the politicians – believe it should be. It is at least possible that the policy makers could, if they wanted to, greatly expand government's role in the social services and might even, for good or ill, be able to extend the sphere of State management and ownership. Perhaps there is something in the elitist explanation after all. Be that as it may, an emphasis on ideas, as in this paper, leads directly to the question: whose ideas? Crucial though this question is, it is, alas, too large a question to be pursued here.

If one had to sum up the argument of this paper in a phrase, it would be that Louis Hartz in *The Liberal Tradition in America* was right, perhaps even righter

³³ See e.g. Butler and Stokes, *Political Change in Britain*, Part II and Chap. 18, and Angus Campbell *et al.*, *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960), *passim*.

than he knew. There is nothing new, of course, in our assertion that a limited conception of the role of government is a central element in American political thinking: every textbook has a paragraph on the subject. There is nothing new either in our saying that Europeans and even Canadians do not share this conception to anything like the same degree – if they share it at all. What probably is new in this paper is the contention that these differences in beliefs and assumptions are crucial to an understanding of the distinctive pattern of American policy. It is our contention that the pattern of American policy is what it is, not because America is dominated by an elite (though it may be); not because the demands made on government are different from those made on governments in other countries; not because American interest groups have greater resources than those in other countries; not because American institutions are more resistant to change than those in other countries (though they probably are); but rather because Americans believe things that other people do not believe and make assumptions that other people do not make. More precisely, elites, demands, interest groups and institutions constitute neither necessary nor sufficient conditions of the American policy pattern; ideas, we contend, constitute both a necessary condition and a sufficient one.